OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN- MOBILE

COMMAND & CONQUER

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF WESTWOOD'S HIT RTS SERIES

MARVEL VS STREET FIGHTER

RYU KICKS BUTT!

THE HEROES OF CAPCOM AND MARVEL DO ALL OUT BATTLE



WWW.RETROGAMER.NET

MANIC MINER

10 PRINT "MATTHEW SMITH IS ACE"
20 GOTO 10

BEHIND THE SCENES OF GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

BACK TO THE 90s

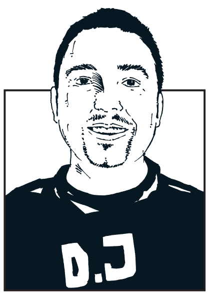
DEVELOPER LOOKBACK ELECTRONIC ARTS PART 2

THE 1943 FRANCHISE

THE MAKING OF... MDK

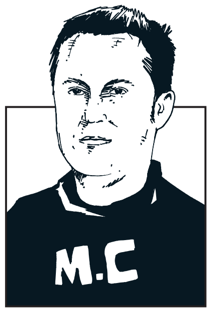
THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE SPECCY GAME



DARRAN JONES

My favourite game would have to be *Spy Hunter*, as it brings back warm nostalgic memories of nipping around to a friend's house after school and everyone trying to beat the high score.
Expertise: Hiding my expensive Magic: The Gathering addiction from my wife
Currently playing:
The Club
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



MARTYN CARROLL

On Monday it's *Deathchase*. On Tuesday it's usually *Target Renegade*. I'm a bit indecisive on Wednesdays – either *TLL* or *Cyclone*, depending on the weather. Erm, you get the idea.
Expertise: Flying the 8-bit flag
Currently playing:
Silent Hill Origins
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



STUART HUNT

I guess I should say *Bomb Jack*, given the turbulent history we have together.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Assassin's Creed
Favourite game of all time:
Assassin's Creed



MIKE TOOLEY

I would have to say *Pyjamarama!*. I loved the puzzles and quirky twists on established themes, spent more time playing knife and fork invaders than anything else, cool characters and great ideas permeate.
Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played
Currently playing:
Ace Combat 6
Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!



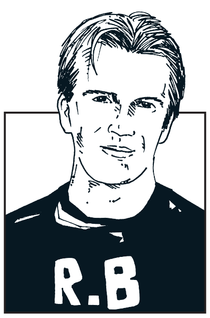
PAUL DRURY

Jetpac and *Manic Miner*. I was a Commodore kid and these made me think I'd backed the wrong horse. I hadn't, but still great games…
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Rain Shower (Game & Watch)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

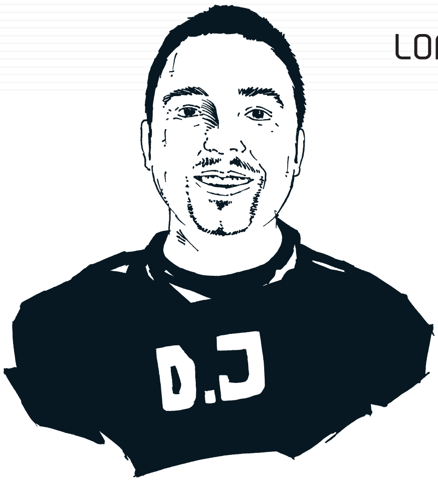
As a massive fan of thrilling arcade games, it's got to be Mervyn Estcourt's utterly fab *3D Deathchase*. That he managed to squeeze the game into 16K is utterly amazing.
Expertise: Accidentally wrecking hard drives
Currently playing:
Hunt the interviewee
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



RICHARD BURTON

See below! Second choice would be *Dynamite Dan*, a splendidly colourful game with oodles of neat touches and surprisingly good sound effects. It's immensely playable and maddeningly frustrating in equal measure.
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming
Currently playing:
Psycho Fox
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...



No matter what your opinion is of the retiring Liverpudlian coder, there can be no arguments about Matthew Smith's massive contribution to 8-bit gaming. As a result of this and to tie in with our Spectrum-themed issue, we've not only interviewed the hairy one, but also plonked him in front of *Manic Miner* and made him tell us everything about his seminal platformer.

Still, as we've already mentioned this is an issue that sings the praises of Sir Clive's range of classic computers, so within these hallowed pages you'll not only find an in-depth look at the Spectrum 128, but also our own personal top 25 (which, if it's anything like last month's racing feature, is bound to raise a few eyebrows).

Still, if you don't really care for one of the UK's most popular computers we still have plenty of other articles to whet your appetite. David Perry reveals the secrets behind his PC blaster *MDK*, there's the final part of our in-depth Electronic Arts article to enjoy, a behind-the-scenes look at the *Command & Conquer* franchise and a detailed look at Capcom's *194X* franchise.

Enjoy the magazine







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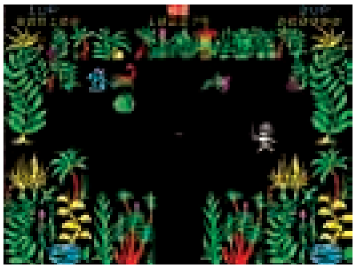
MATTHEW SMITH SPEAKS

52 HE MAY HAVE ONLY CREATED A HANDFUL OF GAMES ON THE ZX SPECTRUM, BUT MATTHEW SMITH IS STILL HAILED AS A GENIUS BY MANY RETRO GAMERS. THIS IS WHY…



THE BIG FEATURE

82 WITH SO MANY FANTASTIC TITLES AVAILABLE, IT'S VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO NAME THE ZX SPECTRUM'S BEST 25 GAMES OF ALL TIME. NOT THAT THAT'S EVER STOPPED US THOUGH…

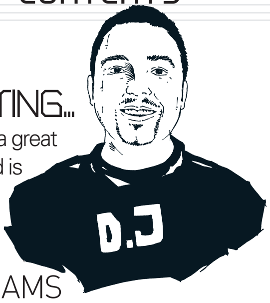


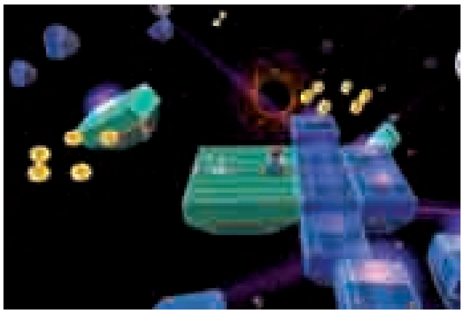
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RETRORATED

THE GAMES LISTING…

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it







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RETROINSPECTION

SPECTRUM 128

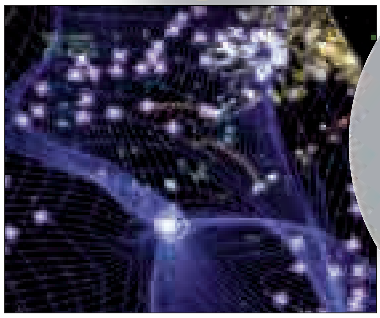
60 It may have only enjoyed a very short shelf life, but it was still worth owning Spectrum's 128K beast.



COMPLETE HISTORY

COMMAND & CONQUER

68 It might not have been the first RTS, but Westwood Studios' *Command & Conquer* still moulded the genre.



THE MAKING OF…

GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

78 Find out how Kuju turned a popular Xbox Live Arcade release into one of the Wii and DS's best shoot-'em-ups.

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue...

SUPER SMASHING GREAT

MORE SEGA HITS COMING TO Wii



Lovejoy's so tough, even the clouds get out of his way.



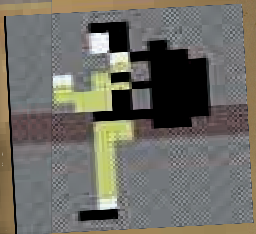
Fantasy World's bosses, it has to be said, seem a little wooden.

The hatchet burying by Sega and Nintendo has, so far, been a good move for both companies. The illusive *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* proved a massive release for the Wii, and there's little doubt in our minds that *Super Smash Bros Brawl* will become the biggest release for the console to date. The much-anticipated third game in the cutest fighting series known to man, as you read this, will have already sent Japanese Wii owners into all sorts of hysterical arm-waving hysteria for a few weeks now.

We sincerely hope the future brings us more Sega and Nintendo collabos, perhaps a shoot-'em-up designed by Suzuki and Shiggsy (neither has thrown their hat into that genre yet) to be released on the Dreamcast 2 – itself a superhero hardware team-up of biblical proportions between both parties.

Well, until D-Day 2, further chummy activities between the two companies are about to go down with news that many Master System, Mark III and Game Gear titles will be appearing on the Japanese Virtual Console around about February time. The two games that will spearhead Sega's 8-bit transition will be *Fantasy Zone* (500 points) and *Fist Of The North Star* (600 points). Sega currently distributes its 16-bit Mega Drive titles on the service, so we guess it was only a matter of time before the rest of the company's back catalogue made the leap.

HERO OF THE MONTH



THE GHOSTBUSTERS

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of *The Ghostbusters*

First appearance: *Ghostbusters*

Distinguishing features: Furry Pants

Weapon of choice: Proton Pack

Most likely to: Mess up the place

Least likely to: Care

Interesting fact: Ghostbusters HQ was reused in the movie, *The Mask*.

PIER SOLAR COMING TO MEGA DRIVE

SEGA'S HOMEBREW COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER TO BRING US A NEW RPG

Now, it's widely considered that the Super Nintendo boasted a far better library of RPG games than the Sega Mega Drive, but actually... aw shucks, look, who are we trying to kid here. *Zelda, Lunar, Chrono, Final Fantasy, Earthbound, Secret Of Mana* and *Young Merlin* going up against the valiant force of *Phantasy Star, LandStalker, The Story Of Thor* and (ahem!) *Sword Of Vermillion*.



Look out for a 'Making of' in our next issue.

It seems that despite lacking in the RPG trouser department in the Nineties, the Mega Drive has recently become the console of choice for homebrewed RPG efforts. A few issues back we brought you the news of a reissue of the sublime *Beggar Prince* game by the talented chaps at Super Fighter Team.

This month we hear that another epic RPG is due an eminent release on the Mega Drive and Mega CD in the autumn (hopefully). *Pier Solar* is a new RPG that's been developed by the Sega homebrew community. Well, after seeing the trailer for the game we sought to track the guys down and find out a little more about the project. Set in the town of Reja, *Pier Solar* tells the story of three friends who embark on a quest to find a magical herb to cure a dying father. The quest will see them unravel an ancient mystery and see the strength of their friendship put to the ultimate test when an evil force beckons to destroy their peaceful town.

The game is shaping up very nicely and we will have a mini 'Making of' in the Homebrew section of our next issue. However, if you can't wait till then, there is a devlog up so people can chart the progression of the game. You can find that at http://tavernrpg.blogspot.com.

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 32: JAIL BREAK

What the chuff. Despite the chunkiness and the colour, this action-packed old-school Konami run-'n'-gunner about rounding up recently absconded jail birds is made to look nothing more than a lightgun game about playing a slightly obese, mildly psychotic-looking police officer with a clay nose, 17 fingers and no kidneys.



JUST IN WE'VE MORE DETAILS ABOUT STREET FIGHTER 4'S CHARACTER ROSTER. THE LINE-UP INCLUDES; KEN, RYU, GUILE, E.HONDA, CHUN-LI, GUILE, BLANKA, ZANGIEF AND NEW GIRL CRIMSON VIPER

ONE CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

THE ONE CHIP MSX COULD BE TRAVELLING THE POND



The One Chip MSX could soon be making its way to Western markets.

The One Chip MSX has been out for two years now in Japan. A sleek version of the MSX-2 home computer, this cheeky little number comes packed inside a transparent blue case which, as well as leaving little work for the imagination, can be hooked up to a keyboard to play MSX cartridges.

The MSX was one of the most popular 8-bit micros in Asia and, as such, garnered the interest of Konami and Hudson Soft long before Nintendo developed a toaster that could play videogames – if you used some magic breath, of course. Well, it seems the ball is in motion for the unit to finally outstretch to Western markets.

Earlier this month a representative of MSX Association, ESE Artists Factory and Bazix (the company responsible for distribution outside of Japan) sat down to discuss the future of the machine's Western release. D4 Enterprises was the company responsible for the production of the machine in Japan, but it seems for the Western One Chip MSX, as it's now known, it has been decided that a new manufacturer should take the helm.

Sander Zuidema, from Bazix, had this to say, "As D4E focuses more and more on digital software distribution, it didn't seem probable for this company to become responsible for the Western One Chip MSX after all, so we came to the conclusion that it would be better to focus production of the Western One Chip MSX elsewhere. Together with MSX Association and ESE Artists Factory we have discussed the changes that have to be made to make the One Chip MSX suitable for commercial distribution on the Western market, as well as some improvements to the Japanese version. Next, we have started looking around for companies that can produce the Western One Chip MSX." If you want to put your name onto the mailing list or would like to pre-order one, visit www.onechipmsx.com.



Wii MARCH

PARAPPA GUYS TO RELEASE A NEW Wii GAME

***Major Minor's Majestic March*, as well as being a mouthful of Ms, is a forthcoming rhythm-action game exclusive to the Wii that's set in the linear world of marching bands.**

With baton in hand (so we can safely assume that the Wii Remote will get in on the action) you'll have to make your animal band members follow you, keep them in time with the tempo and attract new members by waving your hands in time with the music.

Major Minor's Majestic March will bring together again the musical talents of Masaya Matsuura and artist Rodney Alan Greenblat, creators of the PSone's *PaRappa The Rappa*. As we're such enormous fans of the freestyling Fido's romancing exploits we think this project's certainly one to keep a beady eye on. There's no word yet on an actual release date yet, but to hazard a guess we'll say probably sometime in March (boom, boom!)



Think PaRappa the stick tapper.



LAST-MINUTE NEWS



PENTA'S BACK

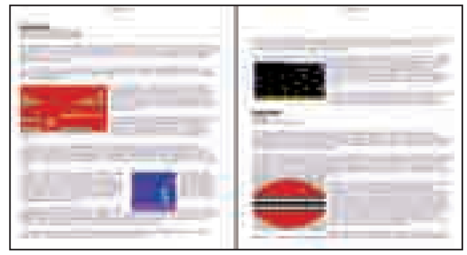
FATSO GETS A NEW GAME DEAL

Some of you might remember reading a weird Eastern Promise feature we ran on *Yume Penguin Monogatari* in issue 44. It was a surrealist platform game about a gluttonous penguin on a weight-loss mission to win back the love of his ex-girlfriend.

It appears those brilliant bods at Konami and Sumo Digital have stumbled across our article and picked up on the subliminal 'bring back Penta' messages that we cleverly stuffed into the main body text.

Penta has now been added to the *New International Track & Field* character roster. This is good news for us, because we're massive fans of the *Penguin Adventure* games, and good news for Penta, because now he might be able to keep the weight off and stop his friends from calling him pregnant.

SO YOU WANT TO BE A VIDEOGAME REVIEWER?



If you're a keen writer and a massive Spectrum fan, then get in touch.

NEW FAN-WRITTEN SPECTRUM BOOK PLANNED

It's a lavish lifestyle for the avid games writer, we can tell you. Every morning we're driven to work in a stretch limo, loaded with continental breakfast-type food objects and a selection of the morning's papers inside plastic sleeves to ensure the grubby ink doesn't taint our delicate little fingers, fingers we must *only* ever use to play videogames – which we do for about seven hours a day. The other hour of our working day is used to take turns transcribing the output on a powerful super computer called GED that was built by William Shakespeare to write reviews and features for us.

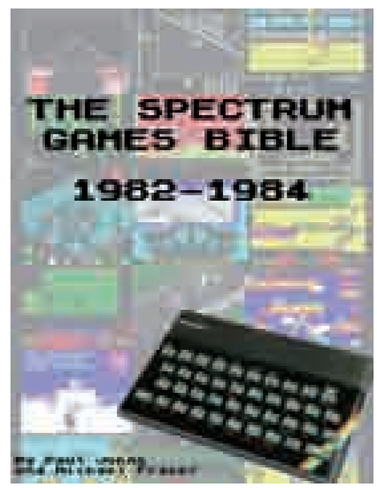
Okay, enough of this nonsensical rant because we're actually here to tell you about an upcoming Speccy book, and how you can get involved. Author, Paul John has recently teamed up with Michael Fraser, from the Rubber Beermat website, to create a "non-profit 800-page book that will feature 500 reviews written by Spectrum fans."

"We've created a website – www.spectrumgamesbible.co.uk – where we have listed the games to be reviewed in each book. The first book to come out will be 1982 to 1984, and will feature over 200 games reviews and screenshots," says Paul.

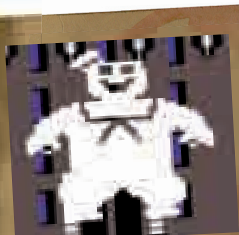
Paul hopes to produce six books, his intention being to create a comprehensive library of reviews and memories for Spectrum fans. The books will be published by lulu.com and Paul is now looking for aspiring writers to contribute. So, if you're a Spectrum fan looking to get involved, take a trip to the website, pick a game you know better than your own kids and get in touch.



The book that all avid Spectrum fans have dreamed of.



VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



THE STAY PUFT MARSHMALLOW MAN

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH

Without bad villains there would be no good heroes. What would Batman be without The Joker? What would Mario be without Bowser? Complete rubbish, that's what. This month: The Stay Puft Marshmallow Man

First appearance: *Ghostbusters*
Distinguishing features: Balding
Weapon of choice: Marshmallow Foot
Most Likely to: Taste of marshmallows
Least likely to: Taste of spanners
Unusual fact: The marshmallow glop was actually shaving foam

DUKE NUKEM [TAKING] FOREVER

IT'S TIME TO KICK ASS AND... ERM... SOMETHING-SOMETHING... BUT WE CAN'T REMEMBER WHAT THAT SOMETHING WAS

Okay, lovely readers, the trailer's been up for a while now, but there could be a few of you unaware that 3D Realms' long-awaited *Duke Nukem Forever* is finally moving forward.

The project has been plagued with a stammered production, and despite philandering around for almost a decade, the plot and specifics have always remained under tight wraps. There has been a new teaser trailer circulating around the web though, which, in keeping with clandestine tradition, tells us absolutely nothing about the game.

It's just a video showing Duke lifting a tiny barbell that a day-old fetus could quite easily bench-press, with cutaways of increasingly angry aliens growling and the like. Duke then stands up, blows cigar smoke in our face and says, "I'm looking for some alien toilet to park my bricks, who's first." We're just not sure about this one, we just hope 3D Realms forces us to eat our bricks (actually, that sounds pretty sick).





eMag

Retro Gamer Diary

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING RETRO GAMER
IF YOU WANT **RETRO GAMER** TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



FEBRUARY

MEGA MAN ZX ADVENT

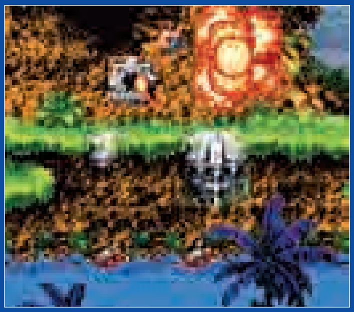
Released: 29 February

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Mega Man may not get swathes of screaming female fans and perfumed parchments of wedding proposals with Western gamers any more, but in the East his blue Y-fronts are still a national treasure. Capcom has announced that he will be getting a second DS outing, so expect more portable run-'n'-gun action, plus a function that apparently lets you morph into fallen bosses.



MARCH

CONTRA 4

Released: 23 March

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Other mags don't get it: 'It's too hard', 'It doesn't add anything to the series', 'The action's split over two screens.' Whinge, bleat, moan. Okay, when we learned that the developer behind such licensed tosh as *The Scorpion King: Sword Of Osiris* was entrusted with the franchise our heads fell into angry hands, but *Contra 4* is a sublime run-'n'-gun blaster that gives the third game a run for its money.



MARCH

HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2 & 3 RETURN

Released: 28 March

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Capcom's *Umbrella Chronicles* really proved that the Wii is more than apt to take on the survival-horror genre, break away from the *Balamory*-style gaming and become the console for short, sharp intakes of unfettered arcade action. Sega has cottoned onto this and is bringing its sublime horror blaster *House Of The Dead* to the Wii.



MARCH

SEGA SUPERSTARS TENNIS

Released: 28 March

Publisher: Sega

Price: £29.99-£49.99

Format: PS3, Wii, 360, PS3, DS

Capcom once dominated our Diary page, earning all our love, but this month we pledge our love to Sega. *Superstars Tennis* looks set to include a host of characters ranging from Sonic to some charming primates from *Super Monkey Ball*. Best of all, though, is the return of *Space Channel 5*'s Ulala. Up, down, up, down, serve, serve, serve.



MARCH

WORMS: A SPACE ODDITY

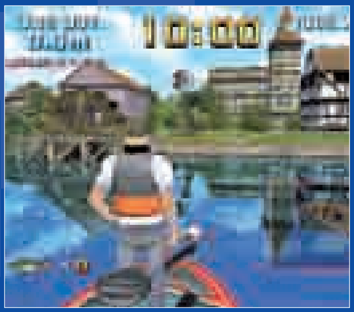
Released: 28 March

Publisher: THQ

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Worms? Worming its way onto Wii? It was inevitable really. Fast forward a few thousand years to when humans are born with game consoles implanted in their retinas, and the phrase 'I recently picked up *Worms'* will have two very different meanings. Until then, however, the latest iteration promises us new-look wrigglers, party games, and a plethora of old and new play modes. We just hope the controls get a hefty shot of sensible.



MARCH

SEGA BASS FISHING

Released: 23 March (US)

Publisher: Sega

Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

While there's little doubt that a fishing game will work immaculately on Wii, we can't help wondering why Sega is bothering with a bass game. We all know that the bass is the most dreary of fish – not as smart as a perch and lacking the killer instinct of a pike. Worst of all, they became really arrogant after the original arcade game was such a hit, and are apparently already making ridiculous demands. Stupid fish.



MAY

SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL

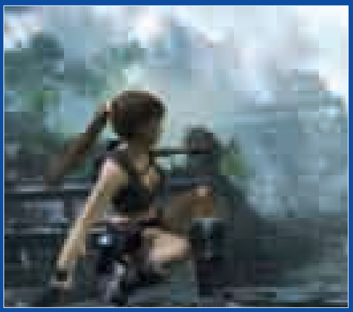
Released: 30 May

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

Yes, it's frustrating that the thing keeps getting pushed back, but it's hard to complain when the end result could well be the most comprehensive battler ever. The latest news from the *Super Smash Bros* grapevine is that Diddy Kong and Sonic are now playable characters and that it will include a level select with a brand-new level available for download each day. We are bursting with joy.



OCTOBER

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

Released: 31 October

Publisher: Eidos

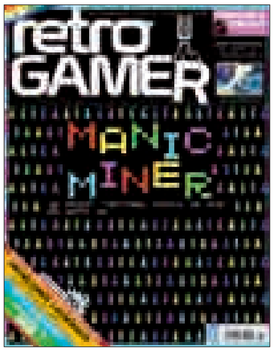
Price: £49.99

Format: 360, PS3

After the success of *Legend* and *Anniversary*, Lara Croft is again flavour of the month, so you can't blame Eidos for releasing a third title in as many years. Following on from *Legend*, Lara finds herself up to her neck in bad guys and ancient artefacts. Expect puzzles, a better aiming system, and a clever new engine so you can find your way around more easily.

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER!

GROUP HUG

Dear Retro Gamer,
It saddens me greatly to read comments berating a particular era of gaming (8-bit seems to be the popular target). Rather than weigh in with my own opinions, I would like to offer this as a summation of why this argument will never end and why we should learn to accept each other's views.

Retro gaming is like any other interest, in that whatever establishes that interest then becomes the emotional benchmark against which all subsequent comparatives are measured.

In other words, the first experience is the one held dearest, regardless of its actual merit.

And here is our key: our experiences are subjective, personal and dictated by chance, circumstance and memory. Moreover, in the context of retro gaming, by its nature, these experiences are often a part of our childhoods and are therefore immune to the objectivity of hindsight. Once we accept this then we realise the arguments are irrelevant to all but the proposing party. So, I would say, ignore the dissension, don't print the rants, simply continue the good work of honouring as wide a range of retro gaming as possible.

Remember the maxim: you can't please everyone.

Yours faithfully, Martin Gillespie

What a great letter, Martin. Thoughtful, intelligently written and, above all, it's completely free of Amstrad CPC slandering. If only all our letters were this insightful. Expect a binder and T-shirt in the post very soon.


8-bit computers like the Amstrad should be embraced by all retro gamers, and not have scorn cast upon them.

INFOCOM ALL GONE

Help me, **Retro Gamer**. You're my only hope. I'm 31 years old and feeling a horrible void in my soul. I can't help wishing I could go back to when times were simpler and games didn't have graphics. What I'm talking about, of course, are Infocom text adventures. I previously had an understanding that Activision (it owns the rights, doesn't it?) was going to re-release the collection. It happened years ago with the *Lost Treasures Of Infocom* compilations, but most of those are on floppy disk. The ones that are actually on CD-ROM are incredibly expensive on eBay and I have no guarantee that they'll work on Windows Vista or Mac OS 10.5. I assume that they will, but I would so much rather have a brand spanking new version. Will it ever happen again? Any information would be greatly appreciated. I was too dumb as a little kid to finish *Deadline*, but I think I'm finally smart enough now, having known the touch of a woman. Umm... I mean having come of age.

Rob Swan
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

It's a crying shame that these titles are proving so hard to get hold of. We've not heard any more news about the re-release yet, but we will report any updates as they happen. We can't confirm if the games you're after will work on Vista, or Mac OS10.5, but why not ask our forum?



EVERY MONTH, ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

GUIDING LIGHT

Dear all at RG,
Congrats on a top magazine. I have been alarmed of late to see the amount of letters from people who no longer find the buyer's guide useful! I have found this invaluable since I started to get the magazine.

I was from the generation that grew up with the introduction of the Spectrum and subsequently moved on to the NES, Mega Drive and PlayStation. However, if it were not for the listings at the back of the magazine, I would not have started my collection of systems, as there were many I did not know about or know what I should be paying.

Now, I am enjoying games from around 1977 all the way through to the GameCube; if it was not for this section in the magazine, that may never have happened. This guide is great for anyone starting out collecting retro games, systems or even those wanting to sell. Please don't get rid of it!

Cheers, Simon Pophale

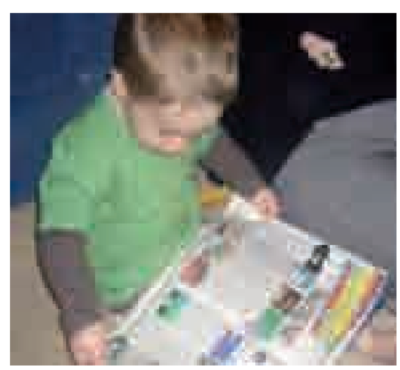
Glad you're enjoying the buyer's guide section. It's unlikely to ever disappear but we appreciate that it needs a nip and tuck. Hopefully, we'll get this sorted for issue 50.

START THEM YOUNG

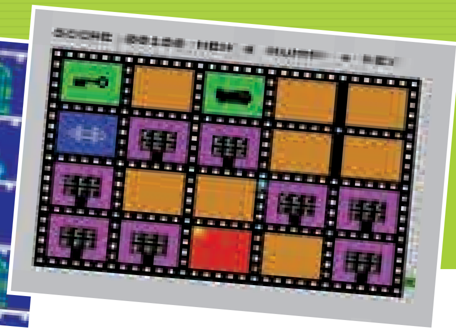
I would like to put in for the youngest "valid" reader of **Retro Gamer**. My son Harrison, who is two years old, shares my retro passion and enjoys skimming through the **Retro Gamer** pages. When it arrives he will even put his *Bob The Builder* mag down in favour of some classic retro pictures. I do worry when he points to a pixelated 16x16 sprite and says "daddy", though.

Stu Collier

That's a great picture, Stu, your son obviously has good taste. We're not sure if we're happier about the fact that we're picking up new readers or that we're better than Bob The Builder*, though.*


» Does **Retro Gamer** hold the key to Harrison's paternity? Stu Collier would like some answers.





EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER ASKS A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTS THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE MOMENT IN ELITE?

FROM THE FORUM

ID: Heavy Stylus
Scuba Dive. I have such fond memories of that game.

ID: The Master
Thru' The Wall, off the *Horizons* tape. Actually more time was probably spent dissecting it than playing it - myself and a mate cracking up (for no good reason) when we found the "squashed ball" sprite is a memory that's stayed with me for years...

ID: Shin_Gouki
Jet Set Willy, just last year (I'm a late bloomer)! I fell in love.

ID: Fanaiel
First game on the Speccy? That would be *Harrier Attack*.

ID: LeeT
It was either *Booty* or *Sabre Wulf* - the latter being one of the best Speccy games, in my opinion.

ID: Spudhead
Atic Atac was the first game I played. You can keep all your polygons and surround sound... that effect when you fell down a trap door was the coolest thing ever.

ID: GarryG
I think it was 'Wheelie' at a friend's house, on their brand new rubber keyed calculator thingy that you plugged into the TV. I was more interested in programming my VIC-20 at the time!

ID: pleccy
The first game I played on the speccy was 'Spike' by Firebird Software (1985). It was actually the first game I ever played on any format. That loading screen still haunts me!

ID: McBoosh
My earliest memory of playing a Speccy game is Paperboy, while listening to the top 40 on a sunday evening. Pet shop Boys no.1 with West End Girls, and i remeber hating this song, but i knew then they would probably become my favouite group. And lo and behold, they did!

ID: markopoloman
Manic Miner for me. Played that on my brother's mate's speccy – thought it was excellent – and still do.

ID: FatTrucker
The Oracle's Cave, (actually still relatively playable) followed closely by *Horace Goes Skiing* and *Trans Am*.

ENGLAND 1, GERMANY 0

Dear Retro Gamer,
We have a magazine about retro gaming in Germany too, but it's not as good as your magazine and it comes out only four times a year. When I discovered **Retro Gamer** by chance in a German magazine store, I think a miracle occurred because we have perhaps 0.2 % magazine stores which sell **Retro Gamer** with an unbelievable amount of only one or two copies. To contribute to your discussion about "what is retro?", I think that all game machines that are out of the stores are retro, but the longer the better. So a higher level of 8-bit articles is okay, but some articles of 16-bit or other retro machines shouldn't be an issue. Oh, and has there been an article about the Commodore C16/Plus4 yet? If not, can you do it – please?

Joerg from Germany, who now has a higher motivation to improve his English skills -thanks to **Retro Gamer**

It's great to see another reader with a sensible approach to the "what is retro?" debate. We're glad you like the mag and we're impressed you're learning English so you can continue to enjoy it.

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH'S COLLECTOR IS BRYAN PATON, A LOCKSMITH FROM GLASGOW, WHO BOASTS A VERY IMPRESSIVE JAPANESE SNES COLLECTION THAT IS SURE TO MAKE YOU GREEN WITH ENVY



» The man himself, Bryan Paton. He's been collecting Super Famicom games now since 1991.



Retro Gamer: When did you first start gaming?

Bryan Paton: My first experience with gaming was on my sister's VIC-20 and then again, slightly later, when I got my Spectrum +2. Although I didn't really get into it until I saved up enough money to buy an Amiga 500 in the late-Eighties.

That ruled the roost when it came to gaming until about mid-1990, when I first started reading about Nintendo's imminent release of the Super Famicom.

I was literally blown away by the preview screens of games for the system and knew I had to try to get my hands on one as soon as it was possible.

RG: When did you first start collecting?

BP: Ever since I got my Super Famicom in early 1991. I guess you could say I started collecting then.

It wasn't just the quality of the games themselves (although they were great, as I got my system along with *Mario World* and *Final Fight*), but it was the first time I had indulged in the world of Japanese imports and after falling for the packaging art and overall experience of the Japanese releases I had caught the bug and wanted more and more.

Obviously prices then restricted how much I could collect (I remember paying £120 for *Super Street Fighter II* in 1994), so it wasn't until about 1999, when you could pick up Super Famicom games for next to nothing, that I started to collect on a larger scale

RG: What's the appeal with the SNES and how many games do you have for it?

BP: The Super Famicom was the first console that I ever owned. Before that it had been 8-bit and 16-bit computers, so the Super Famicom was like a breath of fresh air.

At first it had some incredible launch titles, but it took about a year or so for its software catalogue to build up, then with the US and European launch it began to dominate the home market. With its huge user base it easily attracted the top developers and titles.

I have around 480 complete boxed Super Famicom titles, around a third of what was actually released in Japan and around 20 to 30 US and PAL releases, and even now I am still finding unknown Japanese games that are a joy to play.

RG: Why buy Japanese games over their British counterparts?

BP: There are a few reasons. The main one is that I prefer to have the games in their original format. Nintendo, Sega, Sony and so on are Japanese companies and the majority of titles on their machines are from Japanese developers, so it makes sense that the Japanese releases are as close to what the companies intended as possible.

Many times Western releases of Japanese games are cut or edited during translation to fit to a more Western taste, often needlessly, and this results in the game feeling as though something is missing.

The second reason is that there are around three or four times as many Super Famicom releases as there are PAL SNES releases, so it makes tracking down and playing obscure Japan-only titles more fun.

Also, although it is only cosmetic, the Japanese releases take so much more care with everything. Box art, presentation and box set editions look just so much better than their bland Western counterparts. This is an area of gaming and collecting where I think we are still years behind the Japanese.

RG: What's the rarest game in your collection?

BP: For the Super Famicom, the rarest official game I have is a complete version of *Rendering Ranger: R2*. It is a stunning platform shooter by Manfred Trenz, the man behind *Turrican*.

Being released in Japan only and even then in limited numbers, it is easily the rarest general release cart on the Super Famicom and a boxed complete copy will set you back around £250.



» We initially mistook this for a Supergun, but it's apparently something SNES related (Bryan likes to fix them up in his spare time).



» There are over 1,400 Japanese Super Famicom games to collect. Bryan's doing well, but he still has a long way to go.



» Some of the wonderfully colourful box art of Bryan's game collection.

I do have a promo Super Famicom copy of *The Firemen* and a Super Famicom development cart, they, like all promo and development items, are extremely hard to come by.

RG: Which ten SNES games would you recommend to people just starting a collection?

BP: With so many excellent titles on the Super Famicom, finding a great game is as easy as shooting fish in a barrel, so narrowing it down to ten is a difficult task… but I'll do my best. I'll go for a few titles most people will have heard of as well as a few more obscure Japanese games people might have missed.

1 *Super Mario World*
2 *Super Mario Kart*
3 *Legend Of Zelda III*
4 *Street Fighter II Turbo*
5 *Contra Spirits*
6 *Super Tennis*
7 *Super Castlevania IV*
8 *DoReMi Fantasy* (stunning platformer)
9 *Umihara Kawase* (puzzle platformer)
10 *Scrambled Valkyrie* (quality shooter that shows the SNES could compete with the Mega Drive without slowdown)

RG: Do you collect games to play or to hoard?

BP: Ah, the dilemma facing any retro videogame collector, so I'll sit on the fence and say a bit of both, to be honest. I was, and still am, going for a complete set of Super Famicom games, but with over 1,400 Japanese releases it's going to take a bit of time.

I have lots of mah jong and table games that I have bought purely for the sake of hoarding, but I do play lots of my Super Famicom titles regularly and have recently been trying to buy games that I want to play rather than just own

RG: Is there anything for the SNES that you're still trying to get hold of?

BP: There are two main things missing from my Super Famicom collection. One of them is the Super Famicom Hotel Box. These were installed in Japanese hotels in the Nineties and held eight game cartridges so guests could play during their stay. The carts are changeable, so it was easy for the hoteliers to keep the games up to date. Also many of them were fitted with coin mechanisms so guests had to pay to play. Unfortunately, most of these were binned by hotels in the late-Nineties when the next generation of consoles came along and so have become very rare and almost impossible to find in the UK.

The other item I am missing is *Fire Emblem: Thracia 776 Ltd Edition*. It was the very last official Super Famicom release in Japan, believe

"A FEW OF MY FRIENDS THINK I AM MAD COLLECTING RETRO VIDEOGAMES, ESPECIALLY JAPANESE RELEASES, BUT THEY ARE ALSO THE ONES WHO WON'T STOP PLAYING THEM WHENEVER THEY ARE OVER AT MY HOUSE"

it or not, in April 2000. I have the standard release but the *Ltd* one came in a cardboard chest box with two plush character toys, a map, a book, trading cards, a video and a Satellaview memory cartridge. The last one that I saw, on eBay, sold for £163 and was sadly out of my price range at the time.

RG: What does your family and your significant other think of your collection?

BP: A few of my friends think I am mad collecting retro videogames, especially Japanese releases, but they are also the ones who wont stop playing them whenever they are over at my house.

As for my wife, she is great and supports me totally. In fact, she has even been known to buy stuff for me as presents, so I guess I am really lucky… I love you Nicole.



» Bryan's collection of *Street Fighter* games and peripherals.

If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then please contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 1984



April 1984 – Tanks and Floaters from Japan, CPC464 arrives, Jupiter Ace leaves as does the Aquarius 2, Quicksilva games for a new generation, the big day for Big K and Mastertronic arrives and ruffles feathers… Richard Burton explains all for just £1.99…

Aquarius 2 picture supplied by Garry Wright, **3001.co.uk**.



» Thought the original Aquarius sold badly? Meet the Aquarius 2.

The Japanese MSX invasion may have run out of momentum, but April saw the beginnings of Hudson Soft, the Japanese software house, infiltrating the British home-computer market. It planned to release several titles over the coming months with three to be released on Sinclair's own label imminently. The three games ready for release were *Eric And The Floaters, Driller Tanks* and *Stop The Express*.

Commodore's future was looking bright with the news its new manufacturing plant would be based in Corby, Northamptonshire. It would become operational in September with all European computer manufacturing transferred from West Germany to the new plant. Commodore hoped it would produce 200,000 computers a month with an estimated 600 employees working there by the end of the year. Good times for CBM.

The Aquarius rose from the ashes of its torrid time under Mattel by being rebadged and re-released by its original developer, Radofin Electronics. It revealed the Aquarius 2, which had about as much impact in the marketplace as the original did – virtually none. If it's a bargain you're after then grab a complete Jupiter Ace setup. It was available to buy for £26 after liquidated manufacturer, Jupiter Cantab, had its remaining stocks sold to Boldfield Computing, who were selling them.

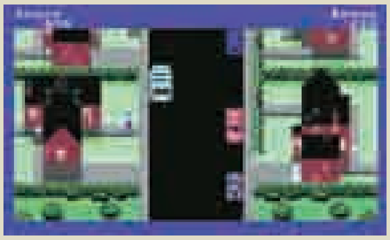


» You speak, the computer obeys – or so the advert persuaded us. In reality, it was a bit more haphazard than that.

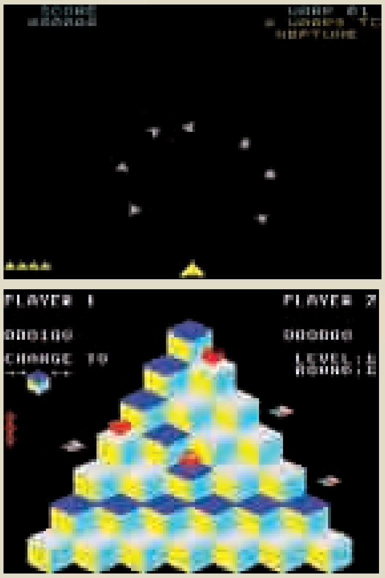
Little-known company Orion Data, announced that its newest software release *Micro Command*, would be available on the Spectrum at the knockdown price of £49.95. For that sort of money you would expect a gold-plated cassette hand-delivered on a velvet cushion by Sir Clive himself. However, there was more to the package than just a game.

Inside the oversized box was a speech recognition system and microphone that would, essentially, do away with joystick control. You could teach your Spectrum to understand basic movements and then use the interface unit and microphone to voice control any game. Sadly, it wasn't up to anything requiring fast movements and reactions.

Quicksilva revealed it was to convert several games from the New Generation Software back catalogue for the C64. The titles already released on the Spectrum that were getting the conversion treatment included: *Corridors Of Genon*, *3D Tunnel* and *Escape*. New Generation was also converting its most successful title, *Trashman*, onto the C64, which would also be marketed by Quicksilva.



» *Trashman* (C64): A game about binmen that you can now only play once every two weeks due to local authority legislation…



» Two screens from the previously lost Parker Brothers Spectrum ROM cartridge games. Thanks, World Of Spectrum!

The much-ignored Spectrum ROM cartridge format seemed to have attracted the attention of Parker Brothers, the US games maker. It announced that it planned to release several titles on the format later in the year. Spectrum owners could look forward to games such as *Gyruss*, *Q*Bert* and *Popeye*.

Up to this point only Sinclair had released ROM cartridge games, so to have an independent games developer creating new titles was seen as a very positive move. The games were expected to cost £10 each but, unfortunately, nothing was ever released by the company and all the games were shelved, thought lost forever.

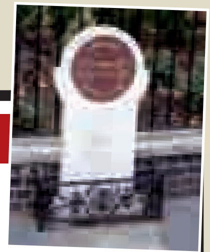
Thankfully, the guys at World Of Spectrum were contacted last year by the owner of the company responsible for doing the conversions for Parker Brothers, and who had a lot of the original development material still available. Some of the games have now been salvaged and preserved. Nice.

April saw the official release of Amstrad's first home computer, the CPC464. Coming complete with a choice of green or colour monitor, the setup was seen as a good value for money with prices advertised at



» £26 would get you a brand new Jupiter Ace package back in April 1984, plus a couple of Sherbet Fountains.

1984



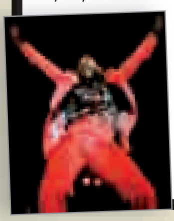
» The memorial for WPC Yvonne Fletcher shot dead on 17 April outside the Libyan Embassy in London.

Diplomatic relations with Libya were severed on 23 April following the shooting of WPC Yvonne Fletcher outside the Libyan Peoples Bureau in London on 17 April. Shots were fired from within the embassy while the WPC was helping to control a crowd during a demonstration outside the building. She died of a gunshot wound to the stomach with several other protesters injured.

UK forces held the embassy at siege for four days and Libya retaliated by surrounding the British embassy in Tripoli, trapping all the diplomats inside. After fruitless negotiations, the Libyan diplomats were ordered out of the UK, although due to diplomatic immunity they were free to leave the country without being questioned.

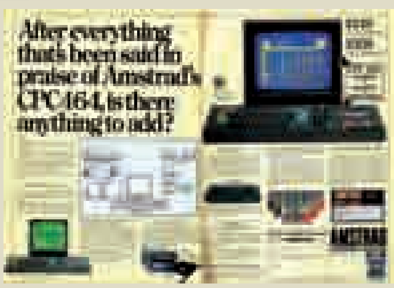
Diplomatic relations were reinstated in 1999 after the Libyan Government later admitted responsibility for the WPC's death.

On 11 April, Australia dumped its national anthem of *God Save The Queen* in favour of *Advance Australia Fair*, which had been voted for by the public in 1977. *Waltzing Matilda* came second… say no more… However, *God Save The Queen* would be used when royalty were visiting the country on official and ceremonial occasions. Presumably not the Sex Pistols' version, though.



» Theophilus P Wildebeeste or Marvin Gaye? You decide…

1 April saw soul singer Marvin Gaye shot dead in his parent's home in Los Angeles. His father, a minister for the House of God Christian sect, had shot him after an argument regarding some business documents. He was charged with murder, pleaded manslaughter and only served six years' probation. Marvin Gaye would have been 45 years old on 2 April.

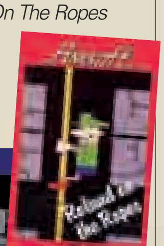


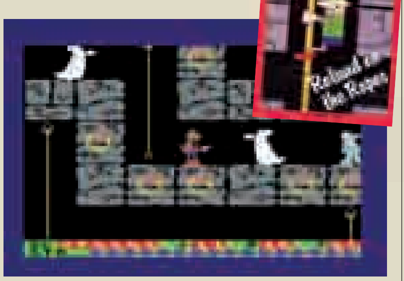
» The Amstrad computer push starts here. Competitively priced, but would it make headway against the established Spectrum and Commodore 64?

£249 and £359 respectively. It was released simultaneously in Germany, France and the UK with reported advanced orders of 250,000.

The bane of many new systems (lack of software) was under control with 50 games ready for release, the majority of which would be released through Amstrad's Amsoft label.

Among the debutant titles were the first of the *Roland* series, *Roland On The Ropes* and *Roland In The Caves*, which were conversions of Quicksilva's *Fred And Booga-Boo The Flea*.





» *Roland On The Ropes* (Amstrad): The shape-changing Roland sprite in his first Amsoft appearance. A very good conversion of Fred as it goes.

Mastertronic, a new software house, concentrating its efforts on budget-priced games, unleashed its first 14 titles for C64, VIC-20 and Spectrum, including *Vegas Jackpot* and *Squirm*. The £1.99 games were well received with the quality generally being good.

The gamers were happy, but several full-priced software houses weren't. Imagine stated that, "…if their games were good enough to sell for more then they would sell them for more." Imagine, who itself had been considering dropping the price of its games to £3.95, had decided against it and continued with its usual £5.50 price tag.

Similarly, Llamasoft was not backward in coming forward in condemning Mastertronic. It said, "It's crazy. I can't imagine people buying these £1.99 cheapos instead of my stuff." Harsh words indeed.

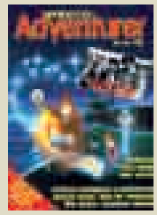
However, Mastertronic had the last laugh when a couple of years down the line a game was re-released on its MAD label that Mr Minter would be fairly familiar with, Llamasoft's *Return Of The Mutant Camels*.

A new multiformat mag from IPC was launched, the short-lived but excellent *Big K*. Although it was a bold, colourful publication with plenty to say including such exotic writers as Nicky Xikluna and Tony Takoushi, it folded after just 12 issues. Damn shame.

Newsfield's Spectrum mag *Crash*, was three issues old and using its Game of the Month tag. Top titles this month were *Blue Thunder* (Richard Wilcox), *Cavern Fighter* (Bug-Byte) and *Night Gunner* (Digital Integration).

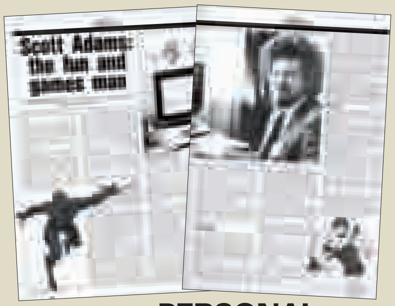
C&VG gave its Game of the Month to *Booga-Boo The Flea* (Quicksilva, C64). Other contenders were *Manic Miner* (Software Projects, C64), *Robotron: 2084* (Atarisoft, C64) and *Doomsday Castle* (Fantasy, Spectrum).

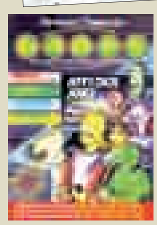
THIS MONTH IN…



MICRO ADVENTURER

The niche market magazine again offered up another terrific interview, this time with Scott Adams; the purveyor of fine adventuring. He talked about his early days of computing, how he plans his games and the *Hulk* and *Spider-Man* adventures he was developing for his Adventure International label after Marvel got in touch.

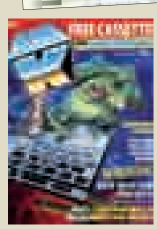




PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES

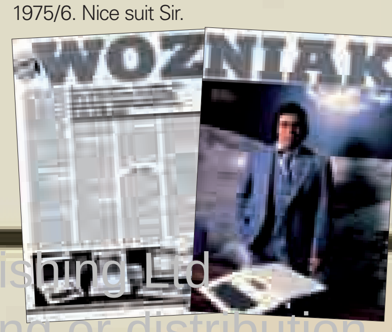
PCG ran a Joystick Jury reviewing the latest batch of handheld controllers. From the selection of 18 sticks, the stick that was going to give you the most joy was the Spectravideo Quickshot joystick, with the least thrilling offerings being the Dragon Data controllers.





BIG K

The first issue of the new magazine and it starts by interviewing the founder of Apple Computers. This was the person responsible for the enormous leap forward in personal computing with its Apple I and II machines, which were developed and released in 1975/6. Nice suit Sir.



CHARTS

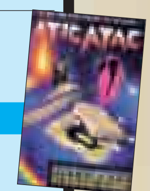
APRIL 1984

DRAGON



1. Chuckie Egg (A&F Software)
2. Pedro (Imagine)
3. Hungry Horace (Melbourne House)
4. Ring Of Darkness (Wintersoft)
5. Space Shuttle Simulator (Microdeal)

SPECTRUM



1. Atic Atac (Ultimate)
2. Fighter Pilot (Digital Integration)
3. Ant Attack (Quicksilva)
4. Manic Miner (Software Projects)
5. Mr Wimpy (Ocean)

COMMODORE 64



1. Manic Miner (Software Projects)
2. Super Pipeline (Taskset)
3. The Hobbit (Melbourne House)
4. Hunchback (Ocean)
5. Booga-Boo The Flea (Quicksilva)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART MAR '84

1. Hello (Lionel Richie)
2. You Take Me Up (Thompson Twins)
3. A Love Worth Waiting For (Shakin' Stevens)
4. People Are People (Depeche Mode)
5. Glad It's All Over/ Damned On 45 (Captain Sensible)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1990



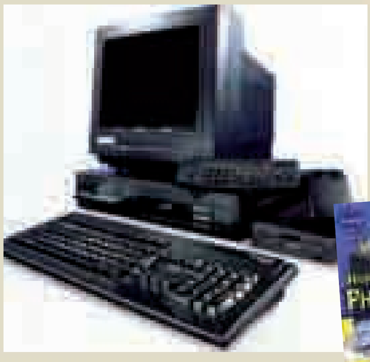
July 1990 – TurboExpress and CDTV announced, ThunderCats, Ho!, Hong Kong Phooey is go, Welltris on the way, Mean Machines tests the water, a dodgy looking Liverpool kick-off and Die Hard arrives. Richard Burton dons a vest and bleeds everywhere…



» NEC's TurboExpress handheld console wasn't a huge hit but was ideal for throwing through jewellers' windows in smash and grabs…

With Nintendo having the Game Boy, Atari with its Lynx and Sega pushing the Game Gear, it came as no surprise to find other companies vying for a lucrative slice of the handheld gaming cake. The newest machine to be announced was NEC's TurboExpress. No, it's not a vacuum cleaner but a bulky handheld console boasting a high resolution LCD colour screen. It also had the most powerful specifications of any of the handheld consoles at the time.

Unfortunately for Europe and the UK, it was only getting an American release, as part of NEC's determined attempt to break into the US gaming market. The problem for the machine was it suffered hardware problems. The sound would frequently cut out due to cheap components and the LCD screen would suffer from dead pixels, even on brand new machines. Combine that with a hefty $299.99 price tag and many gamers were deterred. NEC's American onslaught was once again thwarted.



» The Amiga CDTV with full compliment of extras. Not overly successful but it did pave the way for the CD32.

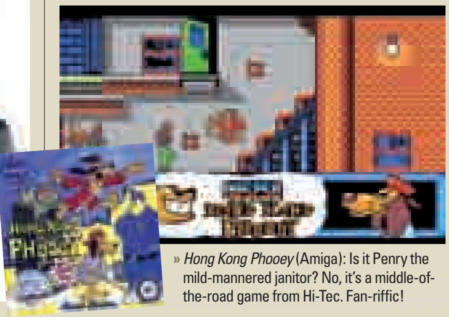


» *ThunderCats* (Amiga): Another example of something great being turned into something brown and smelly. That Cheetara was a bit of alright, though…

The much anticipated CD Amiga was due for a late summer release according to Commodore, who had been drip-feeding details to the press about its new system for months. The machine, eventually called the Amiga CDTV, belatedly appeared in March 1991, and was hyped as being a complete home entertainment system. In reality it was an Amiga 500/3000 hybrid with a CD drive and joypad. A keyboard and disk drive could be attached as optional extras, making it into a more conventional computer.

Although the premise of the new machine was sound, the lack of software support and the exaggerated price tag – an eye-poppingly severe £499 at launch – relegated the machine to a life as a bit-player in the computer world. If nothing else, it was a groovy-looking piece of kit with its smart black casing.

Software house – Elite – continued to push its Encore budget label, by announcing that several new games were ready for release. *Buggy Boy* and *Overlander*, alongside *Bombjack* and *ThunderCats*, would be out by the end of the month and were all available on Amiga and Atari ST. Elite also had a new movie-licensed game in development – *Gremlins 2: The New Batch*.



» *Hong Kong Phooey* (Amiga): Is it Penry the mild-mannered janitor? No, it's a middle-of-the-road game from Hi-Tec. Fan-riffic!



» *Die Hard* (Commodore 64): As licensed games go, this was a surprisingly good effort complete with a superb end sequence. Yippee-ki-yay…

Hi-Tec Software, producer of numerous cartoon-based budget games, was at it again with another couple of Hanna-Barbera-related titles: *Ruff And Reddy In The "Space Adventure"* and *Hong Kong Phooey*. Regrettably belying Mr Phooey's "Number one super guy" tag, and following the trend for most of the other Hanna-Barbera tie-ins, both titles turned out to be average at best.

Activision had acquired the licence to *Die Hard* and was not far off from releasing the finished product. The publisher had also obtained permission to develop an *Alien vs Predator* game. Now that's forward thinking – get a game out a full 14 years before the movie gets released. Mind you, it wasn't until



» *Alien vs. Predator* (Game Boy): Based on the comic book series, it was a pretty dull offering considering the subject matter.

1990

JULY NEWS



16 July saw an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter Scale hit the Philippines, causing buildings to collapse and resulting in over 1,600 deaths. Baguio City, a popular tourist destination, suffered badly, with collapsing hotels accounting for 1,000 deaths alone.

» During the earthquake that hit the Philippines, several hotels collapsed killing hundreds of tourists.

2 July saw 1,426 pilgrims killed when a tunnel collapsed at Mecca during the Feast of Sacrifices at the end of the annual pilgrimage. Many were trampled to death as others tried to escape, many others died of suffocation and others from being hit by masonry. It was believed over 50,000 people had converged on the tunnel that connected Mina, a tented city for pilgrims, to Mecca, causing structural failure.

21 July, Roger Waters, formerly of Pink Floyd, staged a performance of *The Wall* in the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. It was held at a spot where the Berlin Wall had once stood and was in commemoration of the falling of the wall in November 1989, as well as being a fundraising effort for the World War Memorial Fund for Disaster Relief. An estimated 200,000 people attended the concert. There were guest appearances from Van Morrison, Joni Mitchell and Bryan Adams, the latter of which apparently mimed playing his guitar throughout his segment. Maybe he was getting in a bit of advance practice for *Guitar Hero III*?



» Berlin and its walls before the likes of Roger Waters and David Hasselhoff became interested in demolition…



» An iconic image that sadly wasn't matched by the actual game.

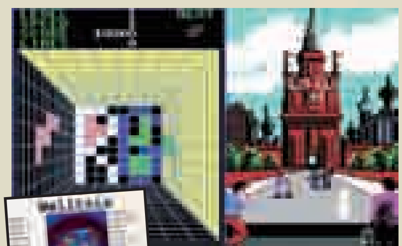
1993 that Activision would release the finished article, with two different games – one for the Game Boy and one on the Super Nintendo.

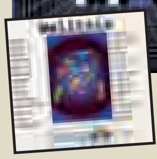
There was more *Predator* gaming action, with Mirrorsoft sealing a deal to produce a tie-in with the *Predator 2* movie. The publisher also announced it had secured the *Back To The Future III* licence, even though it was still developing the *Back To The Future II* game.

Alexey Pajitnov, creator of *Tetris*, divulged that his sequel was almost ready for release. The game, *Welltris*, was *Tetris* based in a well. The principle was the same: blocks fall and you arrange them in lines to make them disappear, except you now have the added headache of making lines of blocks disappear in more than one dimension. The game wasn't quite as ready as Alexey first thought, though, with it being released mid-1991 by Infogrames.



» *Back To The Future II* (Atari ST): Great movie, rubbish game. Stank worse than a 10 day old kipper left behind a radiator.





» *Welltris* (Commodore 64): The belated sequel to the money-making machine that was *Tetris*. Not as good but entertaining nonetheless..

A test issue of a new magazine was given away to assess the viability of the title. *Mean Machines* had been a regular feature in *Computer & Video Games* for many months, but with console gaming really coming into its own, the publisher felt it was time to evolve the feature into something more substantial.

In the multi-format magazine world, *The Games Machine* reviewers awarded their TGM Star Player stamp of approval for gaming excellence to *International 3D Tennis* (Palace, Amiga/C64), *Midnight Resistance* (Ocean, Amiga/ST/Spectrum), *Thunderstrike* (Millennium, PC), *F-19 Stealth Fighter* (Microprose, ST), Hammerfist (Activision, ST) and *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters* (Domark, Amiga).

Similarly, *Computer & Video Games* gave the C&VG Hit status to *Railroad Tycoon* (Microprose, PC), *Projectyle* (Electronic Arts, ST), *Federation Quest 1: BSS Jane Seymour* (Gremlin, Amiga), *Prophecy 1* (Wired, ST), *Ultima V* (Origin, PC), *Thunderstrike* (Millennium, PC), *F-19 Stealth Fighter* (Microprose, PC) and *Combo Racer* (Gremlin, Amiga).

For console gamers, top marks went to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Ultra, NES), *DJ Boy* (Sega, Megadrive), *Formation Soccer* (Human, PC Engine) and *Golfmania* (Sega, Master System).

THIS MONTH IN…

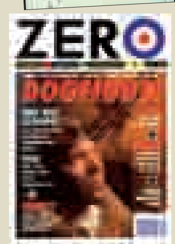
COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



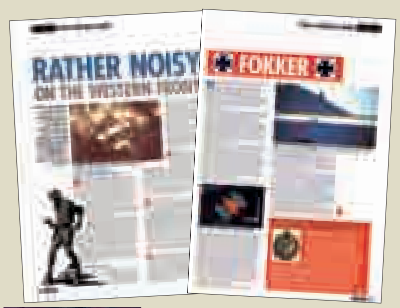
C&VG featured an overview of the new Neo Geo AES console, including a brief look at some of the early cartridge releases that were available. Quite naturally the immense cost of the games was pointed out in no uncertain terms. £120 a game you say? I'll stick with my Spectrum…



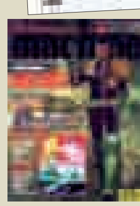
ZERO



With 1990 being the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, *Zero* focused on the multitude of WWI simulations being released. They particularly highlighted the flight sims available and took a closer look at the development of Activision's Fokker (that's a tri-plane, by the way).



THE GAMES MACHINE

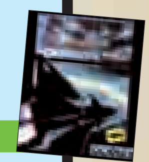


The Games Machine featured a preview of the new *Judge Dredd* game by Virgin. Leading with a superb Dredd front cover, they went on to delve into the design of the new game. The game had lots of *2000 AD* references throughout, culminating in a finale battle with the Dark Judges. Better get that Boing out…



CHARTS

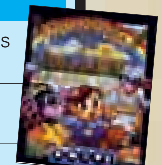
JULY 1990



AMIGA

1. F29 Retaliator (Ocean)
2. Italia 1990 (Codemasters)
3. Manchester United (Krisalis)
4. Rainbow Islands (Ocean)
5. Manic Miner (Software Projects)

ATARI ST



1. Rainbow Islands (Ocean)
2. Midwinter (Rainbird)
3. Italia 1990 (Codemasters)
4. Gravity (Mirrorsoft)
5. Captain Blood (Smash 16)

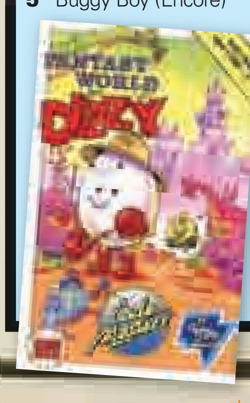


PC

1. Their Finest Hour (Lucasfilm)
2. Ultima VI (Mindscape/ Origin)
3. 688 Attack Sub (Electronic Arts)
4. Chessmaster 2100 (CDS)
5. A10 Tank Killer (Activision)

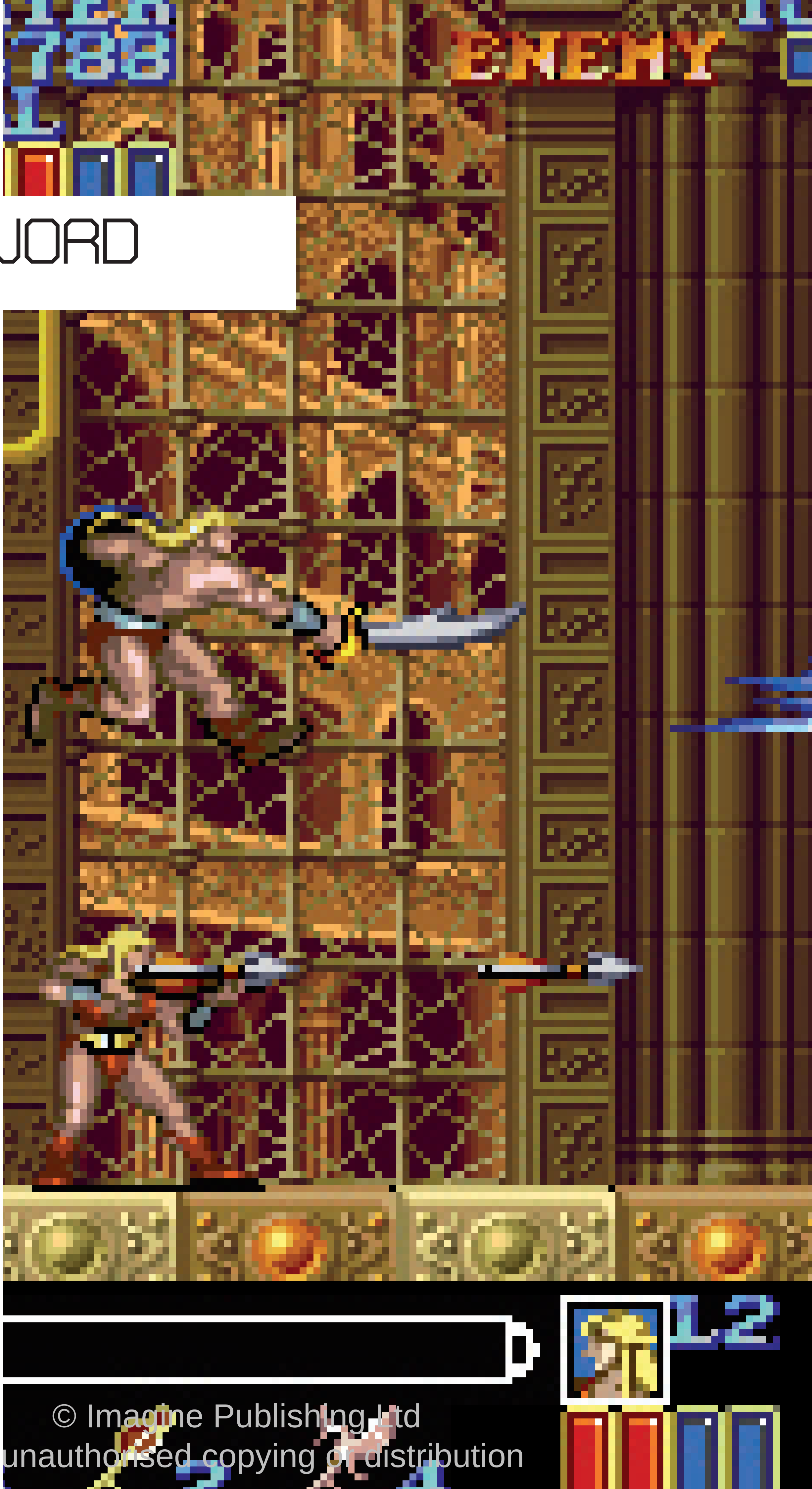
SPECTRUM

1. Fantasy World Dizzy (Codemasters)
2. Paperboy (Encore)
3. Treasure Island Dizzy (Codemasters)
4. Ghosts 'n' Goblins (Encore)
5. Buggy Boy (Encore)



MAGIC SWORD

CAPCOM'S HIDDEN SECRET





- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** ACTION
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £40+ ORIGINAL PCB BOARD



HISTORY

Back in the early Nineties it was always easy to spot the Capcom games when you walked into your local smoke-filled arcade. Thanks to the huge success of its CPS-1 board, Capcom games from that halcyon period immediately caught your attention thanks to their wonderfully vibrant visuals, cartoony style and impressive animation. Oh, and the fact that most of them were amazing to play helped as well…

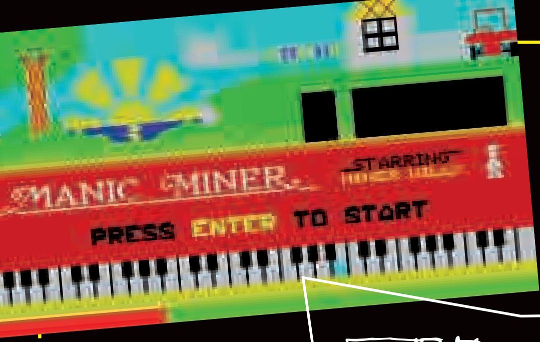
Still, some Capcom games did slip through the cracks, with the excellent *Magic Sword* being a typical example. Taking on the role of one of two hulking barbarians, you were required to do nothing more than ascend to the top of a 51-storey tower. Of course, a simple trek up a stone building does not an exciting game make, so Capcom ensured that your journey was more than a little eventful.

Alright, to be honest, it was bloody hard work. Each floor was absolutely swarming with enemies, which would sometimes require several swings from your huge sword before they finally bit the proverbial dust. Luckily, help was at hand, as each level contained several prisons. Free the person within and they'd immediately help you on your quest by offering a trinket and backing you up with covering fire – rather handy when you're facing an onslaught of bears, skeletons and angry flying lizards, not to mention some ridiculously huge bosses like chimeras and dragons.

Magic Sword may well have been repetitive – the aforementioned bosses are churned out many times over – and you would have had to be some sort of demigod in order to finish it on a single, but it remains a hell of a lot of fun.

Maybe *Magic Sword* is seldom spoken about nowadays because it never reached a wider audience – only the SNES ever received a conversion – or perhaps it's just considered to be a dull game. Hopefully, the accompanying picture should convince you to track it down. Go on… make an old git happy.


L2SELECT
PUSH
4



THE MAKING OF... MANIC MINER

SAT AT THE VERY DESK WHERE IT WAS WRITTEN, MATTHEW SMITH WATCHES MINER WILLY LEAP THROUGH ALL 20 SCREENS OF HIS SPECTRUM MASTERPIECE. PAUL DRURY HOLDS THE ASHTRAY AND TAKES NOTES

CENTRAL CAVERN

"This was the test screen, the first of everything," begins Matt. "The collapsing floors, conveyor belts, the jumps, the colour clash. Using two colours in the bricks of the solid platforms and then when you jump up on to the first platform, that's all testing for colour clash. It has one of all the difficult jumps in, too." How was difficulty determined, we ask. "From the end of the conveyor belt to the higher platform counts as a difficult jump… but I put in a safety net. I plotted it out on graph paper: two pixels and then a parabolic, acceleration down until you hit terminal velocity, at about four pixels a frame, then you started falling straight down. I'd do all the testing and see where you'd land." And what about the clockwork baddie on the conveyor belt? "Oh, just something I'd drawn. There's a bit of Yellow Submarine in him – that's where the mouth in the belly came from. The original sketches I did had water instead of conveyor belts. There were going to be streams of water and I was thinking about making it impossible to go backwards. That would make it more of a puzzle – working out how to get somewhere without going upstream – but by the time I started coding, they'd become conveyor belts."

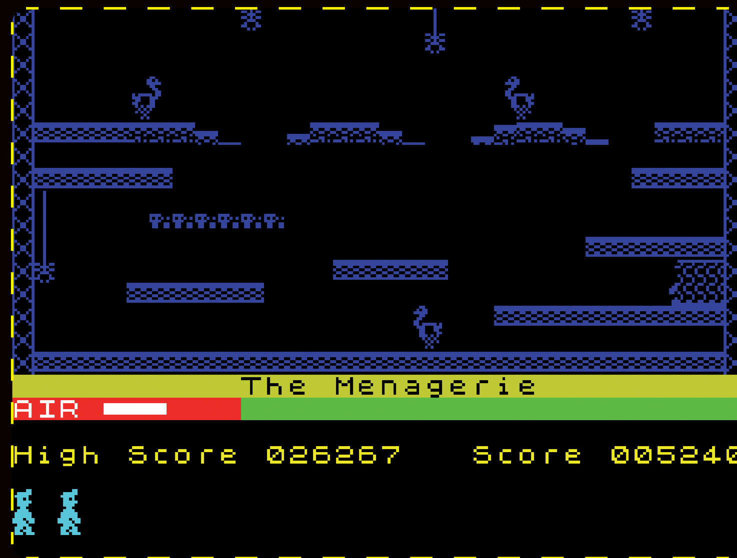




THE COLD ROOM

Matt stares intently at the 'keys' on this level. "They're snowshoes. Well, tennis rackets." He then starts tapping the screen before we gently remind him it isn't a touchscreen. "Mmm, oh, right. I was just thinking about tweaking a pixel. I'm not sure if it would be better light or dark. I must have tried it both ways back then." Ever the perfectionist. And what about the shuffling birdies? "Everyone knows penguins are fully signed up members of the funny animals union." As Willy slowly descends the 'chimney', Matt chirps up, "For disintegrating platforms, I used the video memory of the Spectrum. It was the first machine I had with a bit mapped screen." We note that the Cold Room level is considerably easier than the previous one. "Oh, I didn't do the screens in order. No, I did the first screen first and then I think I made some attempt to sort the rest out and give a graduated gameplay. That's why the first screen is disproportionately hard, because it wasn't part of that scheme."





THE MENAGERIE

Matt scans the collection of creatures on screen. "Here we've got spiders, emus, well, ducks or something. Yeah, they're flying! Well, their feet are coming off the ground. They're having a go! Hang on; there are only two kinds of animal in there. That's a bit lame. There should be at least three before you call it a menagerie!" Matt's French may be questionable, but we wonder if the birds do signify another sort of love, that of a man for his footy team? "Yeah, you could see it as a tribute to Liverpool FC. They're not far off being liver birds and I'm definitely a red shirt."





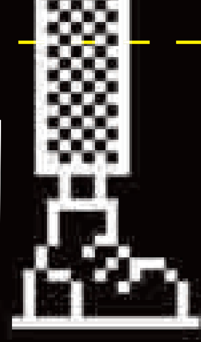
ABANDONED URANIUM WORKS

Matt denies this is a comment on the nuclear paranoia of the Eighties, though it did play on a very real fear. "It's a room full of difficult jumps and you have to go across it more than once. It was supposed to be scary, about testing your confidence." He starts to contemplate the nature of death. "Miner Willy is two characters high and if you fall four characters you're dead. Two, you're safe and three… hang on, was two deadly? Oh, I can't remember…" His memory works better when recalling how he coded Willy's famous leap. "The first two frames, you go four and four pixels, that's one whole character, then it's 3, 3, then 2, which makes eight pixels and another whole character. Then 2, 1, 1, 0, 0, -1, -1, -2, -2… it's a smooth curve rounded to the nearest integer." He grins and inhales deeply. And the performing seals? "Oh, I think that was because I had a six pixel rotating ball and thought, how am I going to make this into a character? I know, I'll stick a seal below it!"

EUGENE'S LAIR

So to the memorable snapping bogs of Level 5. "I was telling my little brother Anthony about the toilet monster that reaches up and grabs you. Yeah, he really believed there was a green monster that lived down there," chuckles Matt maliciously. Not a comment on fellow coder Eugene '*Wacky Waiters*' Evans' career going down the pan, then? "I'd met Eugene a few times. We were passing acquaintances. He'd hit the press before me and he played the media darling far more thoroughly than I did. Must have been jealousy, because he was working for the 'other' company, Imagine and I was still aligned with Bug-Byte when I was doing this. And they were buying flash cars first and writing good games second. Actually, I'd have got more trading in a smashed up sports car than I've had from any residuals." Are those gold bars Willy is collecting? "Nah, they're supposed to be stacks of credit cards. I had a choice of putting in a line to show they're stacked."

THE MAKING OF... MANIC MINER



PROCESSING PLANT

An obvious homage to the arcades of Matt's youth. "Yeah I used to play *Pac-Man* at the Unit 4 cinema in Wallasey." ("Don't look for it, it's not there any more" – *Spinal Tap*, ed). The addition of legs was a feeble attempt to avoid copyright infringement, perhaps? "Oh, I think we were all relying on the American 'Fair Use' provision, though thinking about it, that didn't actually exist in British law at the time. No, there were spare pixels free at the bottom. It had to be ten pixels wide to make it scroll smoothly and because it's round, it's got to be ten pixels high, when everything else is 16, hence the legs." We note the level requires some tricky traversing along platforms with restricted headroom. "Yeah, I was designing routes by this time. I usually tried to get you to go across the screen as many times as possible, which makes things more interesting," cackles the evil genius.



MINER WILLY MEETS THE KONG BEAST

Another nod to the New Brighton arcades he frequented as a lad. "Barrels, bananas… I should have put hammers in and it would have been a complete tribute to *Donkey Kong*," he notes. It includes some testing jumps – "Yeah, some fives on this," Matt confirms, referring to the width of the gap in characters, "and they had to be pixel perfect." – and the first appearance of switches, though flipping both wasn't obligatory. "Maybe that was a mistake," muses Matt. "Maybe you were supposed to flick it to finish the level and I just completely forgot to test it." Then he has an epiphany. "Ah, no! The only violence in the game is completely optional! That's for if you feel a pathological compulsion to kill the Kong Beast. I think I was just being a hippy…" He adopts a 'Neil from *The Young Ones*' accent, which is not hugely different from his real voice. "You don't have to kill the monkey, man!"





THE VAT

Given Matt's on-off relationship with money over the years, we wonder if this is a reference to the Inland Revenue? "Nah, just a huge block of collapsing floors," he assures us. "Pure aesthetics really and no extra code needed. These collapsing floors were supposed to be one thing and I was seeing what else they could be. That's serendipity, that." And what of the kangaroo connection? He exhales and ponders for a while. "Erm, kangaroo meat? Dog food factory? Dunno… could be… random thoughts." With all the disintegration, it must have been an awkward screen to test? "With The Vat, I had my route and tested it over and over again. I didn't really know if there were any other routes. Some of these levels I've only ever done once, to this day. Same principle with the Banyan Tree in *Jet Set Willy*. There's no random numbers in the game. Every time you go into a level, you get the same start positions and speed, so if I can do it once then it's going to be a bit difficult for the good players." That's something of an understatement, Matt. "Quality control," he winks back.



WACKY AMOEBATRONS

"Yeah, a straight horizontal grid, innit," observes Matt of one of the game's more traditional levels. But are those bog brushes on wheels? "Ah, because your collisions with the sprites are pixel perfect, here I was testing what shapes you could clear. Willy was always 16 pixels high, but different widths at different points during a jump. I was testing the limits, so I made it as tall and thin as possible. I think I was going to make it go up and down so you could only jump over it at certain times, but then I worked out that even at the full height a sprite could be, you could still get over it if you timed it right – this was the level where I was finding that out." It's also the first level to undergo a change when *Manic Miner* was re-released through Software Projects. "Yeah, the amoebatrons were originally the Bug-Byte logo, so I changed them when I left. Didn't need any legal advice on that one!"



ENDORIAN FOREST

Those creatures look uncannily like Ewoks, Endor was their home planet and *Return Of The Jedi* was released the same year as *Manic Miner*. Let's take a wild guess and say you were a *Star Wars* fan, Matt. "I was that week! Went to see it, came home and stuck this screen in. Would I be a Jedi or Sith? Oh, Jedi! In fact, I put that on the last census as my religion." At this juncture we suggest a pause to replenish the Guinness and empty the ashtray as we're on screen ten and so halfway. "Nah, this is screen nine," Matt protests. We assure him we've reached double figures. "Oh, sorry. I always start counting from zero." You can't take the hex out of the boy…



RETURN OF THE ALIEN KONG BEAST

Alien because of the pulsating head we assume, Matt. He squints at the screen. "Yeah! It is going in and out!" Matt simulates the throbbing with his hands and this seems to trigger the memory of a little coding quirk. "I gave all the screens literal numbers, so like, if you were using one of those editors that came out, this screen would always have to have a Kong Beast in. Every screen had to share the same code – I couldn't do 20 different programmes – so I'd have flags and if it was one of those screens and another test was passed, whatever it was, Kong, Eugene or whatever, would go to the bottom of the screen and stay there." We watch Willy plunge to collect the final banana before landing safely in the exit. "Do you have to get there before Kong does? No? Oh, I suppose I was playing with you a bit with that," grins Matt.





ATTACK OF THE MUTANT TELEPHONES

The title is a reference to fellow coder, Jeff Minter. "I met Jeff a few times, when we won Golden Joysticks. We got on alright. Talked about music and stuff." We recall you said you liked this screen during your appearance on Iain Lee's TV documentary *Thumb Candy*. "Those phones are probably my favourite. Do you wanna see a photo of the actual phone they were modelled on? A BT 300 series." Matt goes upstairs but returns empty-handed. Quite a busy screen, this. Was there a limit to the number of enemies you could include? "Yeah, four going up and down and four going left and right. Hang on, I think you could change that to eight going up and down or left and right. I think I did that on certain screens. The Skylab Landing Bay… But yeah, eight was the limit. Due to memory. And speed. There's only so much you can draw before everything slows down. So make eight a constant and you don't have to worry about it!"



ORE REFINERY

"Are those lumps of ore? Probably," says Matt. "And you'd imagine a skull and crossbones not to be the target, but it is!" Despite Willy holding one over his shoulder on the cover of the second edition of the game, this level has one of only two ladders that appear in the game. It also has a lovely blinking eye. Any significance, Matt? "Oh ore!" he cries, cryptically. We admire Willy's well-timed, 'no going back' dash to the exit. "Oh yeah, you could've played for ages and get it wrong with that. Ha! I'd draw the platforms on graph paper and put arrows in where… No, no I didn't," he says, correcting himself. "I didn't use graph paper for *Manic Miner*. I wrote an editor on the Tandy for it. I wasn't using graph paper for level design, I was painting them in and playtesting them. I'd do a bit and see if it was possible to get past that. Then I'd add the next bit." And so his masterpiece evolved…

THE MAKING OF... MANIC MINER

SKYLAB LANDING BAY

This level was always our undoing. The random falling objects instilled such panic in our young fingers. "Nope, it's all in a set sequence," Matt explains. "If you tape record this screen, it should be the same on every version. You can learn the pattern." His mind moves on to higher things. "Skylab was launched the year before and it crashed and burned… for the usual reasons. I don't know what they're going to do with the international space station when they can't afford to refuel it. I reckon they'll send it off into a higher parking orbit when they're finished with it… too big to crash and burn." Erm, and the keys on this screen? "Oh, they're computer chips." I notice Matt's fingers are twitching and then he starts making plinky plonky noises, while indulging in some inspired 'air gaming.' He still loves his baby…



THE BANK

We both smile at the rubber cheque on this screen. "Oh, cheques bounce," says Matt, ruefully. The ladders are back, too. "Yeah, that's a trellis. Left and right are the same character. I think you could only use eight different characters on each screen. Or was it four? *Jet Set Willy* was four, I think. That was even more primitive in some ways. The keys were stored separately. Were they? I can't remember. No, no they weren't. You could have a room full of 'em. The ladder was made from reusing a trellis character. There's no flipping in this – the line has to be up the middle. If they're flipped, they have to be stored twice in memory. You bit flip it and it's a completely different number. Flipping is an expensive operation on the Spectrum. Well, horizontal flipping is. Vertical is okay. That's just a memory location." We nod and hope you coders followed all that.



SIXTEENTH CAVERN

"I'd run out of names. Or maybe I was thinking in hexadecimal and thought it didn't need one," says Matt. And what are those enemies? "Flag bugs! In the code. If flag bug equals…" He thinks for a while. "Did they do anything special? No? Perhaps they were meant to. The graphics weren't saved as files, it was done by numbers. I was putting it into video memory. I laid out the levels using the editor but I was doing the graphics on graph paper. I didn't have BOUGIE (Byte Orientated Universal Graphics Interactive Editor) then. A thing I wrote that let me run through four frames of animation, forwards or backwards. Skylab is an exception. They have eight frames for the explosion, but the normal was four." And the keys? "That was an attempt at credit cards," he says. We note the need of collecting the key nearest the exit last, lest poor Willy is trapped with a depleting air supply. "It's not good to have tricks like that. Sometimes you can't resist it," he beams.



THE WAREHOUSE

"This was another experiment that I thought was so impossibly hard it would do nicely as a killer… a boss level!" he explains with a malevolent cackle. "I only ever completed this once [Pedants note, last time we met he confessed to never having completed it]. "Now I've had more practice maybe I could do it in half a dozen goes. With moving things and collapsing floors it's very hard to measure whether something is possible. Because everything is pre-determined, if it's possible once, it's possible for everyone. That's the only way you can really know that you're not on a bum steer." The lawn mower threshers on this level changed into the Software Projects 'Impossible Triangle' logo at the same time the Bug-Bytes were ditched. Or at least, that was the plan…



AMOEBATRONS' REVENGE

The tentacles are back in a reprise of Level 9, though they now seem to resemble the invaders from *War Of The Worlds*. "I thought they were jellyfish but yeah, maybe they have evolved into a higher life form," muses Matt. The difficulty has also grown. "This screen has all the different speeds the enemies can move at, up to four pixels a frame. I did the same sort of thing in *Jet Set Willy* for the Kitchen, but split it over two screens."



SOLAR POWER GENERATOR

Was this a sign of your growing environmental awareness then, Matt? He has a wild, far-off look in his eye. "No more than any other rational person. I'm worried about the environment, man…" he answers in that Neil voice. "I think this is one of the brightest backgrounds. Up till now, I think I'd only done one of the four dark colours. Mainly black." Nice solar-ray effect. Was it tricky to create? "Ooh, highly technical," he laughs. "Nah, just a little bit of code. Easy enough to program. One character wide, go down and if it hits something, go that way – always at a right angle. The Spectrum can only do right angles in colour. Get it bouncing around. They'd call it artificial intelligence now. Doesn't kill you but it sucks your air down when you're in the beam. It's sort of complicated and you do run out of air, but it's not a particularly hard level." We can't be the only ones to strongly disagree…



THE FINAL BARRIER

We're almost home. And with the sun setting romantically over the lake, it never looked sweeter. "Yeah, I'm playing around with colour clash here. The graphics are sort of better. I had more freedom because there wasn't any interaction. If you're on screen 20, put the title screen graphics on the top half and you don't have to worry about 'em. I did do this screen on graph paper, then cut it up into characters and worked it out in hex in my head. No art packages or scanners back then!" Is that a lucky horseshoe signifying the final exit? "Nah, it's omega – the end!" And the fish and dagger that rewarded the heroic few? "Oh, just things I'd drawn that were only eight pixels high and 16 across and I hadn't used in the game," he says casually. But Matt, at the Screenplay Festival a few years back, and admittedly after a few beers, you went on about its religious connotations, that it was your attempt to give gaming a "little bit of folklore"? He takes one last drag of his roll-up. "It might have," he smiles. "You'll find out in my next broadcast…" Ah, if only…





BOX OF DELIGHTS!

COIN OP HITS II



THIS ISSUE WE'RE LOOKING AT COIN OP HITS II ON THE C64. NOW, WE KNOW WE'VE NEVER USED THESE PAGES TO REVIEW COIN OP HITS I, BUT THAT PACK HOUSES SPYHUNTER, BIONIC COMMANDO AND OUTRUN – GAMES WE'VE RECENTLY COVERED AND WE DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO SAY ABOUT THEM. SAD BUT TRUE.

Erm, certainly trying to entice you in with the money-saving benefits that owning such a pack will bring. Nice overuse of the old ten pence, too. Plus, kudos for the magazine quotes… that makes writing the Mag Rating section much easier.







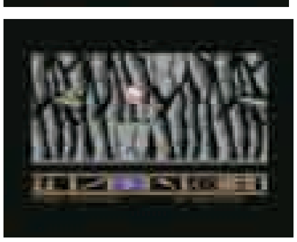
DYNASTY WARS

When you strip it down, *Dynasty Wars* is essentially just a side-scrolling horse-'em-up that's as garbage as it sounds. On its option screen you'll get the chance to pick one of four beardy men, although this is merely a cunning selection ruse given that it makes no difference which one you pick; they'll be perched aloft the same grey-looking horse and they'll all look exactly the same. The only questionable difference we can conjure up is that you get a different portrait of a man getting progressively angry to look at every time you charge up your weapon – which itself looks dubiously like a shotgun. It will also become very apparent very quickly that the horse is a completely superfluous aspect of *Dynasty Wars*. In fact, it's actually injurious to it. Consequently, the smaller enemies prove annoying to blast away and your avatar is an obviously chunky beast that will suck up enemy attacks like peanut covered polo mints. And, just to rub salt into your eye, he's also piggin' lazy. He doesn't gallop or jump over the miniature showjump fences that crop up in the game, instead he trundles along the screen like your feudal foes are attacking him with tranquiliser darts.

TRIVIA ***Dynasty Wars* was based on a Japanese manga, *Tenchi Wo Kurau*.**

MAG RATING ***CVG* 65% Ghastly colours make this version look very ugly, but it plays just like the rest.**





NINJA SPIRIT

Sublime is really the only word to describe Chris Butler's conversion of this often overlooked Irem classic. *Ninja Spirit* is a C64 powerhouse, and while it might not have the bright, bold colourful look of the Amiga port, here the gameplay certainly hasn't been chopped. Tweaked almost to perfection by giving the ninjas that you control in the game a short, square, stubby look, the game indivertibly moves into shoot-'em-up territories and it seems to suit the game a lot better. There are multi-scrolling levels, multiple weapons (including shrukens), a chunky winch, a weapon that looks like a bottle of beer with a tampon cord stuck to it, plus the chance to power up your weapon via the assistance of two purple-looking ninja cohorts that would follow you around the screen like thick farts. *Ninja Spirit* is brilliantly addictive, a joy to play and its ending is a real corker. To sum up, it's the best game on this entire pack.

TRIVIA **If you like *Ninja Spirit*, you should really try to track yourself down a copy of the extremely rare Saturn game – possibly even the rarest – *Psychic Killer Taromaru*.**

MAG RATING ***Zzap!64* A tough, but very addictive slash-'em-up. 90%**

10P OUT OF EVERY POUND

Overall: By adding up all the ten pence pieces on this flyer, multiplying that total by the amount of ninjas that appear in this pack (about eight we believe) we have come up with a ridiculously stupid score for this compilation pack.



HAMMERFIST



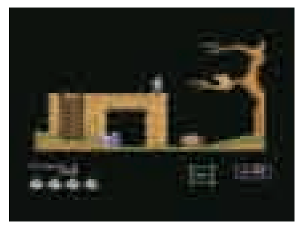


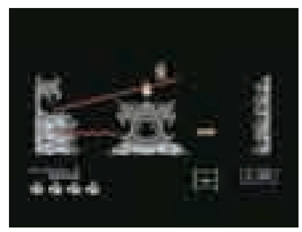
Despite being encased inside a box adorned with a picture of a massive fist with metal knuckles smashing through metal, a cassette tape demonstrating an impressive use of the C64 colour palette is what awaited the purchaser of this C64 game. While *Hammerfist*'s protagonists have a tendency to handle like a badly mortared tank break dancing on an iceberg, the effusive graphics, detailed sprites, varied enemies and intriguing story about some holograms getting spliced together more than made up for it. The most intriguing aspect is that you could morph into two different characters – Hammerfist, a sluggish but powerful phantasm with a hammer for a fist that shoots fireballs, and Metalisis, who can flip a lot. Both characters look so detailed in relation to the rest of the game that it feels like they're in the wrong game. Most of the gameplay involves frequently flitting between characters and using their skills to help you progress to the next section of the game – which begins in a dubious-looking 'underwater base' and proceeds through to a barren desert for a final climactic showdown with someone. It's a puzzle/fighter thing.

TRIVIA *Hammerfist* was initially going to appear on the Konix Multisystem.

MAG RATING Marvellous graphics, marvellous sounds, marvellous gameplay. In a word marvellous.

GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS





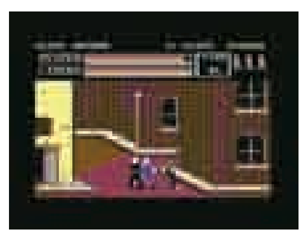
The gaming equivalent of watching the *Super Mario Bros.* movie three times – once on VHS, once on DVD and then once on Blu-ray – Capcom's horror/platform franchise has always delivered up notoriously gruelling affairs. And while there's no denying that the game is a great arcade conversion for the C64, for which Ste Ruddy can give himself a big pat on the back, it's a game that certainly falls heavily into the realms of screen-butting affairs. The real tour-de-snap is the game's levitating platform level where you have to jump across the long retractable tongues of stone golems. A quite frankly ridiculous difficulty plagued this arguably 'classic game'. Personally, for us, *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* is the better game. It came packed with the finest 8-bit foreboding cacophony ever created, it was actually 'playable', which helps, and in certain lights the better looking of the two games, too (sits back and awaits the furore on the forum).

TRIVIA The Mega Drive version of *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* was reprogrammed by none other than Yuji Naka.

MAG RATING *Zzap!64* A highly rewarding megachallenge (now that's an understatement) to keep you occupied for ages. Buy it now. 96%

VIGILANTE





Suffering from shockingly slow gameplay, woolly controls and quite simply being a load of crap, the C64 version of *Vigilante* is a crime in itself. Once you get past how Parma Violet everything feels, the game's direness molests you in a similar way to those blond, sunglasses-wearing enemies that crop up in the game. What Irem has basically done here is take its side-scrolling snakes-in-a-pot fighter *Kung Fu Master* and switched the dojo for a more urban setting. The game's plot finds your hero's girlfriend, Madonna, kidnapped and stuffed inside a van owned by a gang calling themselves the Skinheads, and your hero battling through the mean streets of New York in a bid to get her back. When playing this game certain confusion will certainly stem from a) how this port ever got made, and b) how the Skinheads actually came to rest on their gang moniker. Why? Well, 89 per cent of them have fulsome crops, and some even go as far as to grow full beards. But, as reviewers, we are trained to allow such insignificant inaccuracies wash us by and concentrate solely on the more important aspects of computer games… like how much brand-new 360 games smell like marzipan.

TRIVIA The TurboGrafx port is probably your best bet if you're in desperate need for a decent home conversion.

MAG RATING *Zzap!64* A run-of-the-mill beat-'em-up 54%

The Definitive 194X



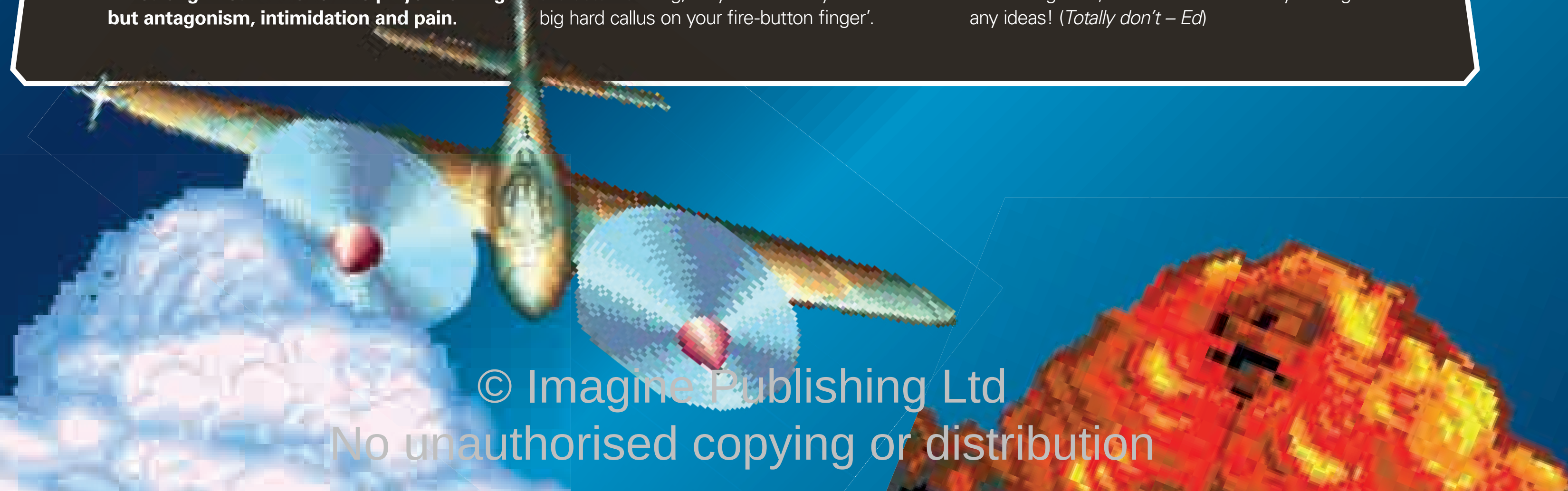
STUART CAMPBELL'S ALWAYS BEEN COY ABOUT THE EXACT YEAR HE WAS BORN, SO WE SENT HIM TO INVESTIGATE CAPCOM'S CLASSIC SHOOTER SERIES IN THE HOPE HE'D LET SOMETHING SLIP

If you've played a *Burnout* game any time in the last five years, you'll know that we live in an age of instant gratification. Modern games shower the player with praise and rewards for switching the console on and pressing Start, and the idea of even slightly delaying a player's progress through the narrative – far less stopping it altogether with some forbidding level or savage boss – is becoming rarer and rarer. So this month, The Definitive thought it'd be nice to salute a series of games that offer the player nothing but antagonism, intimidation and pain. (Much like the first *Burnout* did before it lost its nerve and started catering to cack-handed nine year olds as its primary audience.)

Capcom's *194X* line of WWII vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-ups started with one of the most minimalist arcade games since the advent of colour displays, and while the series has evolved in technical terms and the gameplay has become more sophisticated, the core values at its heart haven't changed an iota. This is shmupping as the Victorians would have designed it – austere and character forming, if by 'character' you mean 'a big hard callus on your fire-button finger'.

This feature was going to start with an intro referencing the bit in Orwell's prophetic future vision *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (if you haven't read it, put down this mag *now* and do so), where the hero – SPOILER ALERT – is tortured by a member of the secret police, until I forgot which bit I was going to quote to draw the most apt analogy. But that should give you an idea of the sort of atmosphere the game's design conjures up once you start to examine it. So let's do that.

'Shmupping' sounds like it should mean something rude, doesn't it? Write in if you've got any ideas! (*Totally don't – Ed*)





1984
1942 (ARCADE)

The enormous and lasting popularity of *1942* is something of a mystery, since it obeys none of the usual rules governing mainstream acceptance. There are no rewardingly massive power-ups, no pretty scenery (the majority of the game is played out against a backdrop of plain blue sea, and when you do get to fly over some land it's drab and ugly) and practically no variation in enemies or attack wave patterns (you've seen almost everything the game has up its sleeve by the end of Level 1). It's brutally, implacably hostile (the tiniest lapse of concentration and you're dead, painstakingly gathered upgrades snatched away in a blink) and it sounds like someone hurriedly grating an underfed budgie. Even your secondary power (the loop the loop) is the world's most useless emergency move since hyperspace in *Asteroids* and *Defender* (which randomly killed you about one time in every five you used it), usually putting you back in at least as much trouble as you were in the first place and limited to a measly three uses anyway.

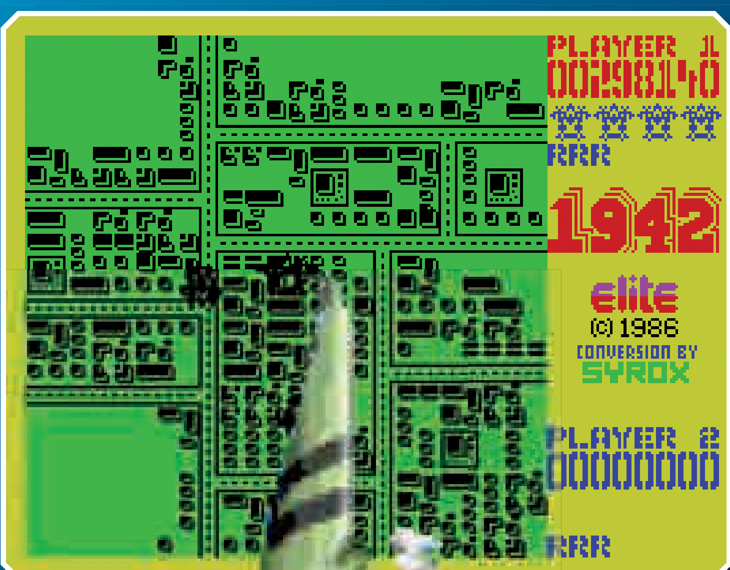
Yet it's that very spartan, Presbyterian air that seems to give the game its appeal – this is a test of stamina as much as co-ordination, and if you've given in to the temptation of the arcade's flashier attractions, a bout of *1942* leaves you feeling that you've cleansed your soul with honest masochistic penance. That's my best guess, anyway.

PLAY IT NOW ON: In addition to the many home ports of the time and (of course) the MAME version, *1942* has been well served with more modern ports, from the GBA version and the PSone's *Capcom Generations* up to the more recent incarnations on PS2, Xbox and PSP. Any of them will do you nicely.

» Not many people get far enough into *1942* to see the more scenic stages, so here's a shot of one of them. Okay, it's not Picasso or anything, but it makes a change from sea.







» Of course, on some levels it might actually have been better to do away with the background graphics. Trust me, you're in there somewhere.



1986
1942 (SPECTRUM)

1942 was converted rather variably to most of the popular home formats of the time (the NES port is pretty faithful, the C64 one so atrocious it doesn't really count as the same game at all), but the Speccy version published by Elite merits a separate mention because it's a truly remarkable piece of work. It takes a game that was already absurdly Spartan and unforgiving and strips it down still further, until it achieves an almost Zen level of minimalist brutality.

For all those people who were finding the original too easy, the Spectrum *1942* starts off by dramatically reducing the player's manoeuvring space. Where in the arcade your fighter takes up just one ninth of the available screen width, on the Speccy it's a whopping one sixth, instantly making it much harder to avoid enemy planes and bullets (see 'The Impossible Dream' boxout). Kicking a man when he's down, developer Syrox also decided to take away all your power-ups at the end of a level (the arcade version let you keep them until you died), and remove the occasional bonus rounds that were the coin-op's only respite from otherwise relentless attack.

The extreme Puritanism also extends to the aesthetics, above and beyond the natural limitations imposed by the Spectrum's hardware. While *1942* was probably the only arcade game ever that the original 48K Speccy *was* capable of an accurate sonic replication of, Elite's version did away with sound almost entirely, with nothing but a tiny '*plut*' when you fired and a brief burst of scratchy noise when you died. More impressively, in some levels the game even did away with graphics, too – in stages which took place exclusively over water (eg the fourth level, or '29' as the game calls it), Speccy *1942* doesn't feature so much as the occasional pixel of wave froth to signify your forward movement, the entire level being depicted as a single static block of cyan.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The Spectrum version of *1942* can be played on the excellent EmuZWin, which is also the best free Speccy emulator.

The Definitive 194X

1987
1943: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY (ARCADE)

Rather unusually for a sequel, *1943* is the exact opposite of its predecessor, in almost every single way. Big graphics, 'event' bosses, thunder-and-lightning power-ups (literally), more variation (boat attacks, plane attacks and constant introductions of new kinds of enemy waves, even though the 16 stages are basically the same one repeated over and over), relatively chummy and forgiving design (the energy-bar system means you can soak up loads of hits without losing any of your power-ups, and energy refills are never very far away) and stirring martial music make for a big, brash experience that is far removed from the stern and serious examination provided by *1942*. Go figure.

What a lot of people don't understand about *1943*, though, is just what an unusual and unconventional shmup it is, even aside from its differences to its predecessor. Offhand, it's hard to think of another shmup in the entire history of gaming that copies its central life mechanic, whereby you effectively have a shield that constantly depletes whether you get hit or not, with a single impact on your unshielded craft ending the game. Where *1942* is all about precision danger avoidance, the sequel throws swarms of enemies and bullets at you that you've got little chance of dodging, but then showers you with lots of energy pick-ups to make up for it.

Perhaps understandably given the circumstances, *1943* is a real mixed-up kid. Power-ups run out whether you use them or not. Secondary attacks save you from colliding with enemies or bullets, but deplete your energy by the same amount as just crashing into them would have done. Special weapons inexplicably jam against certain enemies, or send you into a useless loop instead, even though you've got plenty of energy for the attack. Collecting two wingmen somehow doubles your firepower instead of tripling it. More enemies attack you from behind than in front, but you have no rear-firing armament. The 'Auto' power-up doesn't autofire, but the 'Shell' one does, and so on. There's more weird stuff going on in *1943* than we've got room for here, frankly.

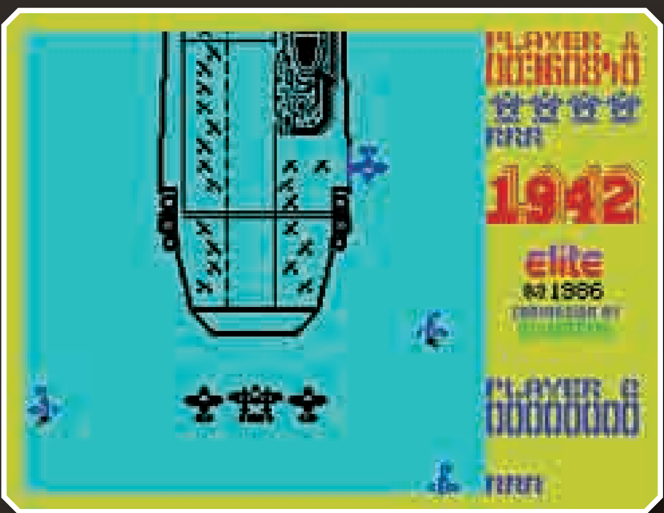
PLAY IT NOW ON: *Capcom Classics Collection* (Xbox, PS2). The original home ports of *1943* deserve separate comment, so read on.



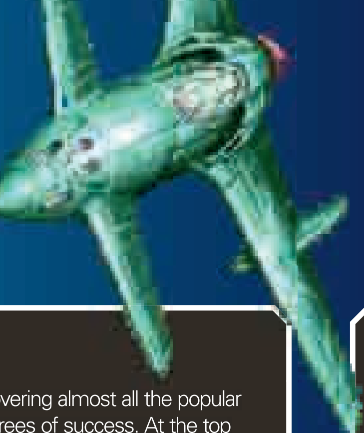
» If you stop firing for ten seconds or so during the later stages of *1943*, you'll end up with a screen looking like this. And then die very quickly.

THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

Fancy a challenge? Here's a task that should keep you busy most of the day. As well as making it harder to dodge enemies generally, the reduced screen space in Speccy *1942* makes holding onto your 'wingman' drone planes for more than a couple of seconds virtually impossible. Your mission is to try to get to the end of any stage with just one of them intact – I'll even give you the poke 50819,195 to make your main fighter invincible so you can use it as a sort of shield. And if you're up for the challenge, the first person to send in proof (ie a proper save state or replay file, not just a faked screenshot) of keeping *both* wingmen alive all the way to the end of a level, will win a year's subscription to the wonderful **Retro Gamer** magazine.



» This never actually happens.



THE WAR AT HOME

1943 had a very wide range of home ports, covering almost all the popular formats of the era with extremely varying degrees of success. At the top end was the splendid Amstrad CPC port, which did an excellent job of preserving the feel of the coin-op despite changing some of the gameplay fundamentals (eg power-ups lasted until you got shot, *1942*-style, rather than timing out, and if the lightning-bomb attack is present this reporter's never been able to find it). And the Spectrum version also did a pretty decent job, albeit with a very strange white-and-blue colour scheme that made it rather hard to pick out enemy shots (and most other things).

The Amiga and ST versions caused considerable controversy, being advertised with wildly misleading and untruthful screenshots (showing far better graphics than the finished game actually had, and depicting things like a simultaneous two-player mode which didn't really exist) hiding a pair of dreadful ports where you were only allowed a single shot on screen at a time. At the bottom of the barrel, though, was the Commodore 64 game, an absolutely abysmal conversion bearing almost no resemblance to the arcade game and playing more like an apology for the machine's diabolical previous port of *1942*.



» Top: *1943* (complete with two-player mode) on the Amiga and ST as it was advertised, alongside the words "Screen shots from Atari ST version." Bottom: *1943* on the Amiga and ST as it looked at the same points.

Oddest of all was the NES version, a radically different game with 50 per cent more levels (24 rather than 16), in which you could intermittently distribute resource points to your fighter to improve its various offensive and defensive attributes – you couldn't even access some of the fancier weapons, for example, until you'd allocated enough points to 'Special Weapon Power'. (In compensation, though, you're armed with an *R-Type*-style charge-beam laser from the start.) Less frantic than the coin-op, it's actually a rather nicer game, and passwords give you a chance of getting through all the extra levels.

1987

1943 KAI (ARCADE)

1943 Kai has a rather strange premise. It's odd enough that Capcom, a Japanese company, would make a game focusing entirely on the real-life defeat of the Japanese at Midway in the first place. You don't, after all, find a lot of German developers writing WWII first-person shooter games where you play the Red Army. But hey, if the global economy is where the money is, that's who you cater to, right?

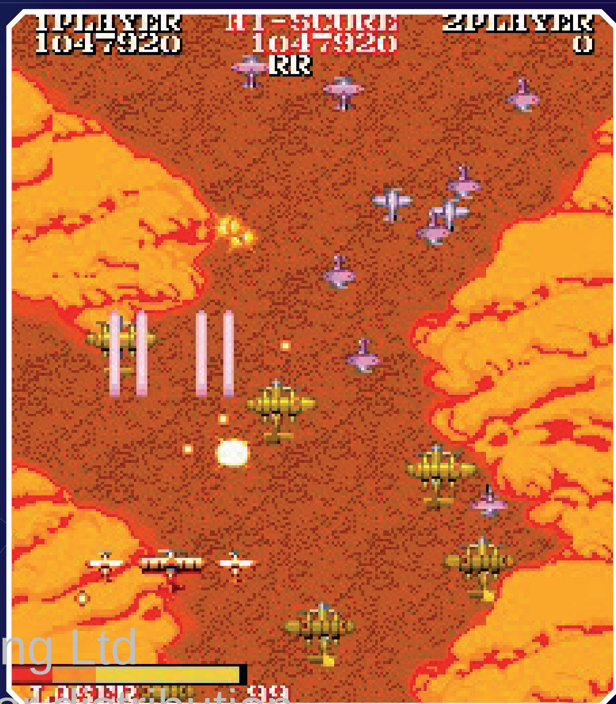
What's even stranger, though, is to then put out a 'remix' of the game, with graphics that are redrawn to look more like the actual Japanese aircraft of the time, and in which you have to shoot down even more of them in order to see the end screen (which waves a big Stars and Stripes and plays *The Star-Spangled Banner* over a triumphant summary, in English, of how the Japanese got a big shoeing from the heroic Yanks), and then *only release it in Japan*. Perhaps it's some kind of national act of contrition for Pearl Harbour or something.

Anyway, *Kai* is a sort of super-intense distillation of *1943*, with new graphics, new music, new scoring and most noticeably a new colour palette (in particular, the 'sunset' levels, where the sea and clouds are a deep orangey red), and all the action squeezed into just ten stages instead of its parent's 16. To help you cope with the scarier enemy forces your armaments are beefed up somewhat – you get one entirely new weapon (a double laser, which can be upgraded by one additional level) plus a more powerful version of the useless 'Shot Gun' from the earlier game. The 'Auto' and 'Three-Way' power-ups have also been combined into one, to ease the pain on your firing finger a little, and your twin wingmen (which don't appear until several levels into *1943* Vanilla, and then only very occasionally) can be collected from every normal 'POW' icon. (Unlike the first *1943*, all the 'POW' icons, rather than just some of them, can be shot to change their contents.)

It's an altogether more coherent, tighter and less random incarnation of the game, arguably the best in the entire series, and it's a real shame that it didn't get a Western release.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The only home port of *1943 Kai* at the time was the very good one for the PC-Engine (though it's a little easy, as a bug often prevents your special weapons from ever running out), which runs beautifully on MagicEngine. You can now play it – in full English for the first time – on *Capcom Generations* for the PSone, the *Capcom Classics Collection* for the PS2 and Xbox, and *Capcom Classics Reloaded* on the PSP, though.

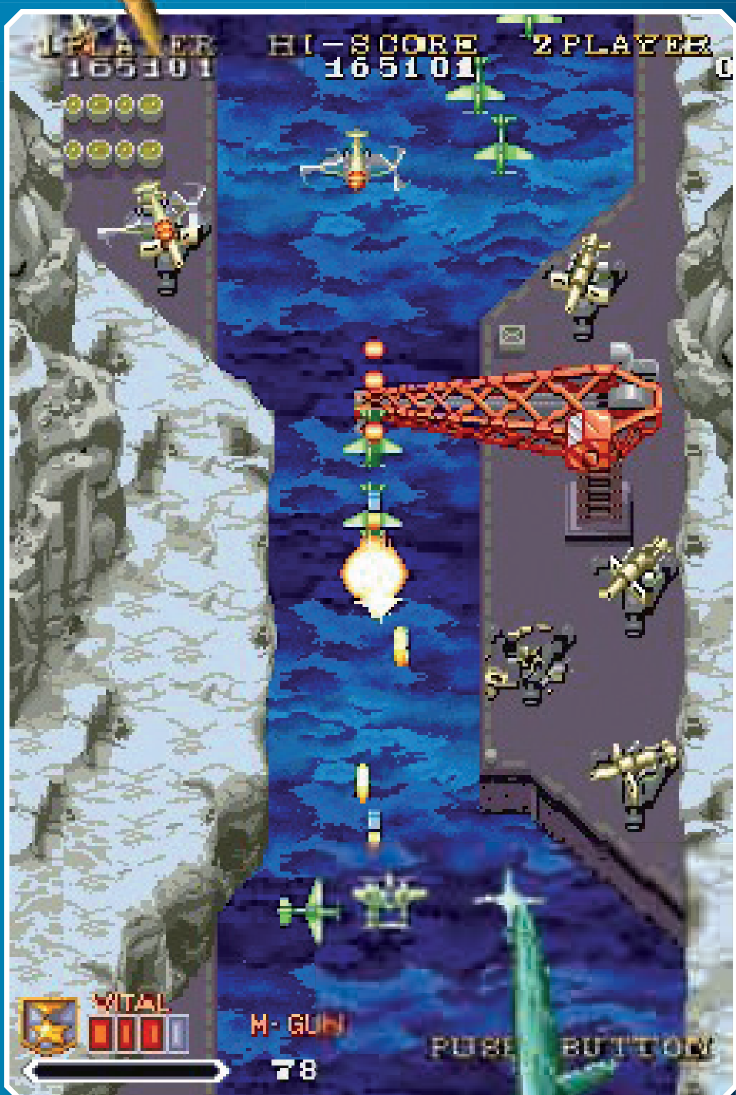




» A smashing orangey bit. Interestingly, with both *1943* and *1943 Kai* all the compilation versions make a significant (and welcome) alteration to the gameplay, by putting the special attack and loop controls on to separate buttons to give you more control over what you're doing. (As well as giving you an RSI-preventing rapid-fire option for all weapons, in case you're a wimp.)

The Definitive

194X



» Hang on – if this is '*Counter Attack*', does that mean it's a Japanese revenge mission against the US? And if it's a counterattack, how come it's set before the previous games? What's going *on*?

1990

1941: COUNTER ATTACK

To be fair to Capcom, one thing you could never accuse it of with the *194X* games was just churning out a string of identical sequels. In fact, the series seems to be used more as a sort of experimental testing ground for new ideas, which can be refined in other shmups. Certainly, it'd be hard to imagine a game that's much less like *1942* and *1943* than *1941* is. (Man, this is going to get confusing by the end of the feature.) The 32 levels of the first game and the 16 levels of the sequel are now down to just six. You've also got a sort of halfway house between *1942*'s lives and *1943*'s energy bar, power-ups now cycle by themselves rather than giving the player control of which one to pick up (turning upgrading into a *Raiden*-type timing challenge), and you now have a secondary charge-up shot that neither runs out nor uses up any of your energy.

The most radical of the many evolutions of the design, though, is the introduction of horizontal as well as vertical scrolling, which also brings an element of *Gradius*-style scenery avoidance to the gameplay. (It's not the only *Gradius* steal in *1941: Counter Attack*, either – as well as the traditional *194X* fixed wingmen, some levels instead give you 'Option'-type drone fighters which trail behind you as you move.) Your fighter is funnelled down river canyons and through huge factories and underground bases, in constant danger of being smashed against walls or cliffs – although implausibly, your machine guns are capable of blasting away entire rock faces – and enemies lurk sneakily behind these obstacles where your (forward-firing) shots can't reach them.

1941 isn't a terribly likeable game. It's poorly balanced, with even your best weaponry hopelessly inadequate for dealing with all the forces that are flung at you, and even more so than *1943* it particularly enjoys launching attacks from directions you can't fire in. You're constantly assailed from behind and the sides, but have absolutely no weapons available at any time that shoot in those directions (unless you count the loop, which here functions as a sort of smart bomb and takes one of your four energy blocks), and the game is a continual dispiriting struggle against this obvious unfairness. By halfway through, when the boss battles get so long you're scared you'll miss a birthday, you'll need extremely dogged persistence to bother continuing, because (in keeping with its lineage) there's precious little reward for all your suffering.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Again, the PC-Engine (or more accurately its upgraded version, the Super Grafx) was the only home format to get a *1941* port at the time, and it was an excellent one. Now, however, you can endure it on *Capcom Classics Collection Vol 2* for the Xbox and PS2, or *Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded* for the PSP.



1996

19XX: THE WAR AGAINST DESTINY

19XX is the odd monkey out at gatherings of the *194X* family, and not just because it doesn't have a '4' in its name. It's the only one not to be identifiably set in the WWII period, and the only one that doesn't take place primarily in the Pacific Islands setting (stages take in tropical jungles and Arctic ice fields, among others), and it simply doesn't feel like the rest of the series. In fact, with the hectic action, big graphics, showers of medals and complicated weapons system, it would sit much more comfortably as part of the *Raiden Fighters* series, which debuted in the same year and which *19XX* resembles far more closely than any of the other *194X* games in character.

As was the fashion of the time (and also like *Raiden Fighters*, and unlike any other *194X* game) you get a selection of variously abled aircraft to fly. In *19XX*, though, the choice seems to be almost totally meaningless, since all three types of plane can use the same weapons to only marginally different degrees of effectiveness (in as much as it's possible to tell how effective they're being at all amid the over-the-top chaos of your armaments). The game features several really stupid set pieces with crassly mixed perspectives – such as the boss fight where you appear to be flying vertically backwards down a waterfall while a helicopter gunship somehow hovers in the Z-axis with its nose pointing straight down, dropping tanks on parachutes at you which are presumably going to land *in a river*. On top of this, the stirring militaristic music of all the previous games has been replaced with some awful, poncy, whiny, noodly soft jazz rock that makes you hate the game's musicians more than its enemies.

Of its nominal siblings it has most in common with *1941* – with a distinctly similar look and palette and an equally poor balance of firepower – but it neither thematically nor qualitatively belongs with them, being considerably worse than even its immediate predecessor. This is one of Capcom's worst shooters since the bad old days of *Vulgus* and *Exed Exes* and I really, really want to stop talking about it now.

PLAY IT NOW ON: There are no home versions of *19XX*, which you should take as a sign. There's a reason this game was left off the numerous and otherwise-comprehensive Capcom retro collections.

» It doesn't even have any looping, for Heaven's sake – the one defining trademark of the entire series. If I was Mr *194X*, I'd definitely be looking at Mrs *194X* through narrowed eyes and demanding a DNA paternity test, to be honest.

» You join us in the middle of a loop attack, with 'EXTREME MAXIMUM FIREPOWER!' about to be directed on to the bomber's main port engine.



2000

1944: THE LOOP MASTER

With diminishing returns from the later games in the series, Capcom had a bit of a rethink in 2000, and decided to move the game in yet another new direction. Taking its cue from the likes of the company's 1999 hit *Giga Wing* and the following year's *Mars Matrix*, *1944* moved from the vertical orientation of the previous games to a horizontal one, freeing players from the cramped and increasingly claustrophobic screens of *1941* and *19XX* and giving them some room to manoeuvre again.

Otherwise it's something of a back to basics, with just the single classic Lightning fighter and one type of main shot, in addition to a smart bomb and a rather splendid merging of loop the looping with a charge attack, whereby holding down the shot button builds up a bar until you loop high into the sky and dive down on the enemy while hammering them with concentrated and devastating fire. (You can even part-charge the bar during quiet moments, and if you're out of smart bombs you can send your wingmen on an explosive kamikaze mission instead – you can build up a squadron of over 50 to keep in reserve.)

Much less complicated than any of the other sequels, *The Loop Master* feels rather like a fusion of the ethos of the original *1942* with the coincidentally named *Strikers 1945*. It played out over 15 levels and (back in the classic Pacific Islands setting), culminating in a truly awesome boss, it's a much longer challenge than most shmups of the time. The only fly in *1944*'s ointment is an ill-judged and deeply horrible soft-metal soundtrack on most of the stages, for which someone ought to have a motorbike helmet full of angry wasps jammed onto their head. It's hard to say which is ultimately best out of this and *1943 Kai*, but both are first-division, old-school shooters and should be your first stops when investigating the series. *1946*, a stats-based RPG where all the pilots are demobbed and have to readjust to life on Civvy Street, will probably be quite a lot duller.

PLAY IT NOW ON: As yet there's been no home version of *1944*, so emulators like MAME are your only option if you don't have room for a bulky coin-op in your kitchen. And you'd be wise to invest in an arcade joystick, because the constant fire-button pummelling of *1942* is back with a vengeance here – no wussy rapid firing for *1944* – and if you use a gamepad your thumb will fall off.

MR EE!

IT'S MR DO!



- **PUBLISHER:** MICROPOWER
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** MAZE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** BBC MICRO
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5 +



HISTORY

It's easy to laugh at Acorn's BBC – in fact we're actually doing so right now: ha, ha, ha – but it's also very easy to forget that it was home to some cracking titles and boasted some truly stunning arcade ports/clones.

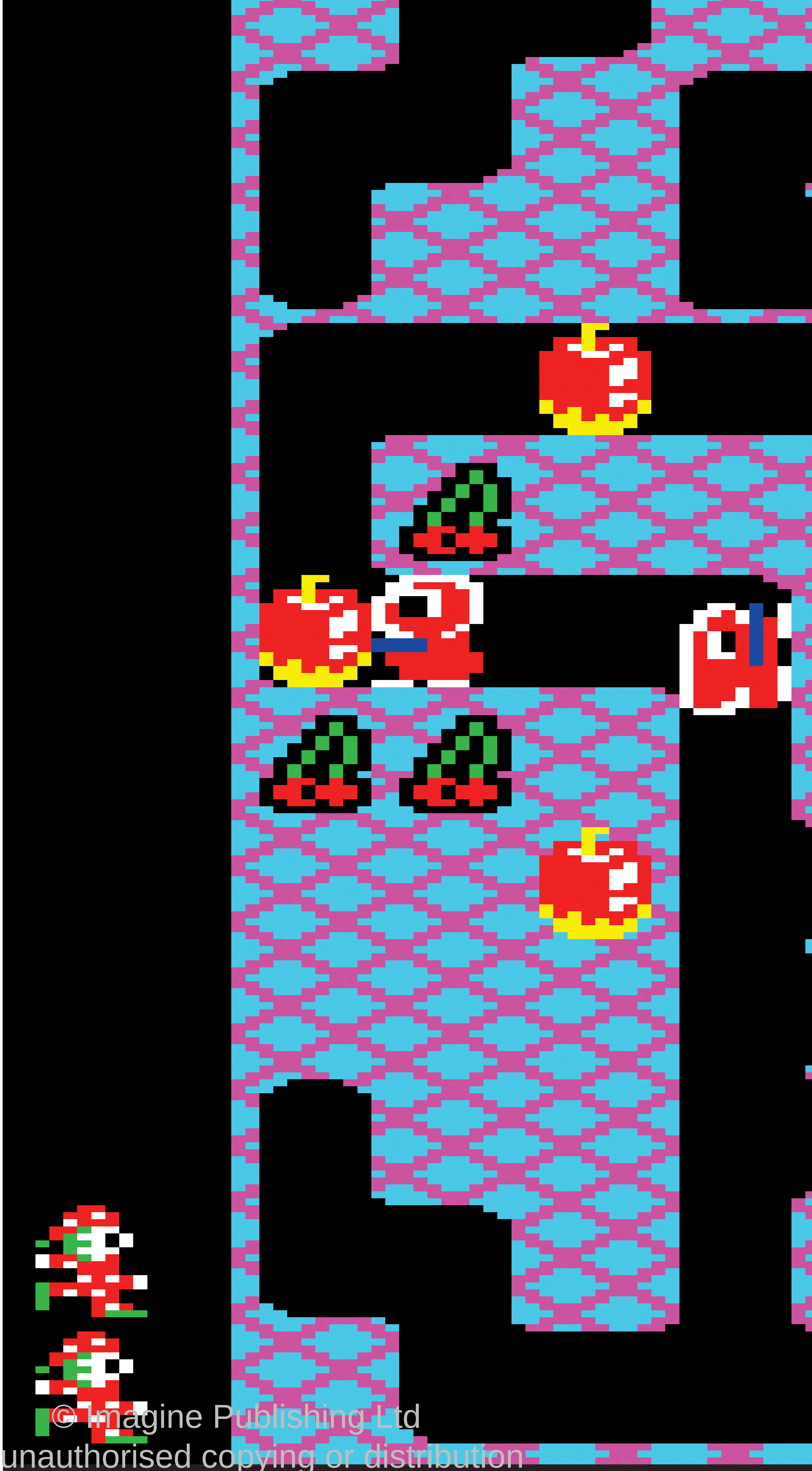
While the vast majority of young children were simply using BBCs to escape from *Granny's Garden* (all in the name of education you understand) a few lucky gamers were actually fortunate enough to have one at home (patiently waits for heckling from Spectrum and Commodore 64 owners to subside).

Anyway, this month we're taking a look at Adrian Stephen's *Mr Ee!*, an utterly superb clone of Universal's excellent *Mr Do!* that we covered all the way back in issue 21.

With its intricately deep gameplay, clever design and beautifully crafted aesthetics, *Mr Do!* has never really fared well on home computers and consoles, and it wasn't until the 1995 SNES release that we finally had a conversion that was able to do the red clown justice. Lucky BBC owners, on the other hand, had no such issues, and long before Nintendo's 16-bit console came along they were playing their own – albeit unofficial – version of the hit arcade game.

Stephens' *Mr Ee!* may not have been given a seal of approval from Universal, and the familiar *Mr Do!* logo was nowhere to be seen, but you only had to see the first level to realise that the red clown had finally come home. Levels were amazingly accurate; the sprites expertly mimicked those seen in the original game, while even the music was eerily authentic – you even got the little scale if you quickly ate all the cherries. Best of all though, the gameplay was virtually identical, meaning that you could use many of the tactics you employed while playing down your local arcade.

Even now, some 24 years after its debut we still constantly return to *Mr Ee!* and if that's not the indication of a classic, we don't know what is.




1000



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

WHILE EMBRACED BY GAMERS, THE MEDIA OF THE MID-NINETIES BEGAN TO TURN ON ELECTRONIC ARTS. BY DECADE END THIS GROUNDSWELL OF NEGATIVITY WAS CLOSE TO OVERSHADOWING ITS SUCCESS. BY 2004, THINGS WERE GOING TO GET WORSE, THANKS TO A PROGRAMMER'S WIFE. MIKE TOOLEY DELVES INTO EA'S MORE RECENT PAST TO FIND OUT MORE

Electronic Arts (PART 3 OF 3)

As the Nineties closed so did the first epoch of gaming. The industry that had fed gamers for almost 20 years was dead. The arcades had gone; small operations weren't tangible any more and were subsequently bought up by bigger studios. Gaming was global, markets were massive, and in any industry where there is a mass market with high reward, getting it wrong, more often than not, is fatal. The videogame industry had developed into a very complex food chain. Releases were fragmented through format, with few games receiving multiformat releases. The new millennium was ushering in a new industry.

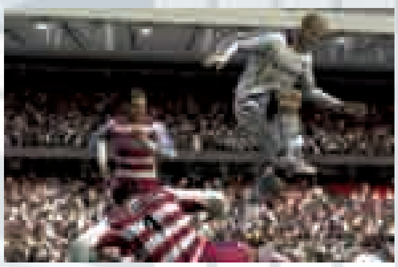
As every month passed, news would be reported of the latest acquisition or bankruptcy. 3DO, SNK and Acclaim would all be bankrupt within a few short years, Sega was failing on all fronts to be saved only by Sammy, Ubisoft was wobbling, DMA was rebranded as Rockstar and so it went on. Then there was the news that Microsoft was coming to the console market, which filled many with trepidation.

By escaping the commercial chaos, EA once again found itself portrayed badly in the gaming press, its decision not to support the Dreamcast was seen as a major stumbling block for Sega and one that many of the Sega hardcore would attribute to the console's demise. It was argued at the time that if the Dreamcast had had *Madden* in the States and *FIFA* in Europe then its life



Above and below: And people say that the *FIFA* updates are hardly noticeable?





EA INSTANT EXPERT



Part of the EA rebrand is to allow the company to pursue adult content in games without tarnishing its family image.

Over the next five years expect to see EA develop its franchise beyond the beaten path, *Command & Conquer Tiberium Wars* is receiving an FPS makeover.

Each Medal Of *Honor* game is uniquely rewritten for Germany. Rather than avoid the market all together, EA removes any Nazi references and tones down the violence.

EA's most recent acquisitions will bring many single-format games to new formats. BioWare and Pandemic both have incredible IP, but more importantly EA has bought Super Computer International, affording the company the technology to develop its online Pong service into something along the lines of Steam.

The genesis for the EA rebrand came when John Riccitiello acknowledged, in an interview, the lack of innovation seen in the industry generally, saying, "We're boring people to death and making games that are harder and harder to play. For the most part, the industry has been 'rinse and repeat'. There's been lots of product that looked like last year's product, that looked a lot like the year before."

EA came in for a lot of criticism for misjudging the potential of the Wii. Once the decision was made to support the console, games were brought in, in under six months that put the competition in the shade.

Despite EA's refusal to keep game servers open once a title falls into disuse, this practice has allowed it to constantly change the online features when releasing updates of its games.

EA's new business model isn't new at all, while *Battlefront* will be freely available to download in the summer. In Korea, *FIFA* has been free for over a year, and is currently generating $1 billion per annum in online micro purchases.

EA has had some heavy conversations with Apple in 2007. Despite moving into mobile development, EA accused Apple of deliberately making it difficult to produce and distribute games for the iPhone, EA is looking for an upgrade and some iTunes support.

span would have been much longer. EA's lack of games support was mooted as one of the best reasons not to buy a particular console, according to many multiformat magazines, tantamount to the strength of the *FIFA* and *Madden* brands at that time. EA's decision not to support Sega wasn't as belligerent as it may seem, however. As a company, EA had contributed as much as Sega itself to the success of the Mega Drive, only to be disappointed that Sega wouldn't listen to the games developer when it came to producing the Mega CD and Saturn. Sega had also maintained a hard line on its licensing structure, a low sales base with difficult design tools made avoiding the console a no-brainer for EA as Keith Ramsdale, EA's vice president of the UK and Ireland explains, "That was a tough decision, but the team decided that our people and resources were better spent focusing on the PlayStation 2. As it turned out, we were right."

Electronic Arts believed the PS2 to be the machine of its generation, and, after arriving late for the PSone party, Larry Probst didn't want EA to play catch up again. *SSX (Snowboard SuperX)* was released by EA on the newly formed BIG label: its announcement left no doubt in anyone's mind where EA was going over the next few years. "*The Exciting World Of Boardercross*," the press release said. "Electronic Arts today unveiled its first entertainment title developed exclusively for the PlayStation 2 game console. *SSX/Snowboard SuperX* – centred on the unique and exciting new sport of boardercross will be on display at the Sony Festival in Japan on February 18-20 as *SSX/Snowboard SuperCross*. Electronic Arts, the world's largest producer of interactive entertainment, is the only North American publisher to be invited by Sony to show software at the festival."

As the only US games producer there, EA had an attentive audience. Within weeks, *SSX* became the must-have launch game, on the most sought-after hardware the world had seen to that point. And while Acclaim, Ubisoft and Activision toiled on the N64 and Dreamcast for low returns, EA would always be a generation ahead on the new technology.

Probst also acquired the licence to the *Quake III* engine, as, at that time, PCs were still far superior to anything a console could offer. Probst hoped that by using the PC's best game engine, EA would remain in front of the competition on consoles, almost putting too much in for a machine to handle, then paring it down until the game worked. *James Bond In Agent Under Fire* was the first of these endeavours and, despite a lukewarm reception from the gaming press and forumites who were still reeling from Rare losing the licence, the game spent months in the

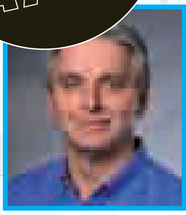
> "AFTER ARRIVING LATE FOR THE PSONE PARTY, PROBST DIDN'T WANT EA TO PLAY CATCH UP WITH THE PS2"

We want *Desert Strike* back as soon as possible.



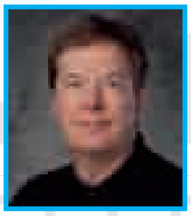
DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

THE PEOPLE AT EA



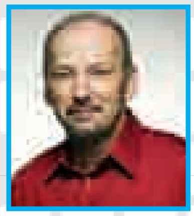
John Riccitiello
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

John Riccitiello looks after all the EA brands. He has worked in a variety of consumer product companies including the PepsiCo (group MD) and Haagen-Dazs International (MD). From October 1997 to April 2004, he was president and COO of Electronic Arts. He then left EA and co-founded Elevation Partners, where he served as MD and oversaw an investment of more than $300 million in the combination of independent videogame developers BioWare and Pandemic, before returning to EA in 2007.



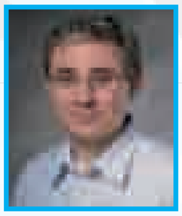
Larry Probst
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

Larry Probst has been there almost from the very beginning. Electronic Arts was generating $102 million in revenue when Trip Hawkins left. The board appointed Larry as its CEO and, over the next 16 years, he managed to increase the company's revenue by a massive 27,273 per cent to over $3 billion annually. Now acting as the company's executive chairman, Larry Probst is Electronic Arts' largest shareholder, owning 1.4 per cent of the company.



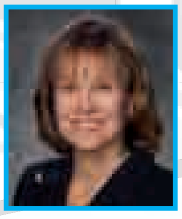
Peter Moore
PRESIDENT OF EA SPORTS

Once the face of Microsoft, Peter Moore was the president of the Xbox and Games For Windows and game development at Microsoft Game Studios. Peter joined Microsoft in January 2003. Prior to joining Microsoft, he was president and COO of Sega of America, where he was responsible for overseeing Sega's videogame business in the US. Before that, he was senior vice president of marketing at Reebok International Ltd. He certainly knows his stuff.



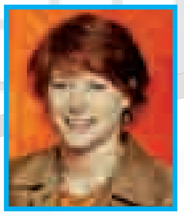
Frank Gibeau
PRESIDENT OF EA GAMES

Frank Gibeau was appointed president of the EA Games label in June 2007. In his role as label president, Frank is responsible for product development, worldwide product management, marketing, and planning for all packaged goods and online offerings within the Electronics Arts brand.



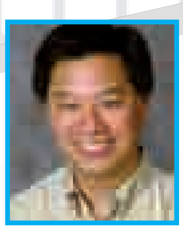
Nancy Smith
PRESIDENT, THE SIMS LABEL

Nancy Smith was named general manager of *The Sims* franchise in September 2005. Prior to that she also worked as executive vice president and general manager of US publishing, executive vice president of US sales, senior vice president of US sales and distribution and as vice president of sales.



Kathy Vrabeck
PRESIDENT, EA CASUAL ENTERTAINMENT

From August 1999 to April 2006, Kathy Vrabeck held various positions at Activision, including president of Activision publishing and executive vice president of global publishing and brand management. Following her departure from Activision, she served as a consultant with various companies, including EA.

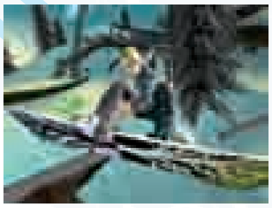


V Paul Lee
PRESIDENT, WORLDWIDE STUDIOS

V Paul Lee has been with EA since 1991 and was named EA Worldwide Studios' president in September 2005. Previously he was executive vice president and COO of EA's Worldwide Studios. Before that he was senior vice president and COO. He also served as EA Canada's general manager.



The much maligned *Agent Under Fire* was a surprisingly good game.



The *SSX* series has been a huge hit on the PlayStation2.

gaming charts. The *Quake III* engine would allow EA to bring the polish and sheen of its sports franchises to new genres and subsequent sequels.

EA wasn't all about consoles though, with its PC output through the early part of the millennium being phenomenal. Beside the newly updated *Sim City*, it started the decade on the PC with *The Sims*. First released in February 2000 it quickly became the biggest selling PC game of all time, selling some 14 million units. At the time of writing *The Sims* has cleared over 74 million units. Dreamworks Studios was acquired by EA and it continued the *Medal Of Honor* series that had started life on the PSone and the PC, before subsequently converting the game back to home consoles. The *Medal Of Honor* games were the main beneficiary of the *Quake III* engine, with the PC versions being famed for their online gaming. EA was riding high while the industry was falling into disarray. New demographs were coming to gaming through *The Sims*, its sports games continued to do well, and games like *Medal Of Honor* and *Need For Speed* were becoming strong brands on their own.

EA also had the licence to *The Lord Of The Rings*, the biggest movie trilogy since *Star Wars*. The doomsayers weren't happy though, and gaming magazines and forums poured scorn over what might be. Electronic Arts responded with what to date is still one of the best movie-tie-in games of all time. Rather than using a cumbersome 3D engine, EA used a pseudo engine that, at times, looked 3D, sometimes isometric but with gameplay that felt 2D. Somehow it had managed to capture the scale of the movies, peppered the game with a simple RPG mechanic and used the actor's likenesses and voices to create, in essence, a movie companion. All the elements and set pieces of the movies and Tolkien's world were here. Unusually, these games were disregarded for the PC, opting instead to return to the books to capture everything from the universe, including the bits that the movie had missed. Again, voiced by the actors and using their likenesses, this was adventuring done to the nth degree.

Coupled with the *Harry Potter* licences, EA had hit a stride so fast that it left all in its wake. The problem with always looking forward though, is that sometimes you don't see exactly what is happening around you. The stats and the figures all point to this being a golden time for EA and the games certainly bore this out, but the wheels were loosening and cracks had really started to show.

In 2004, EA bought Criterion. Despite the success of *Burnout*, Criterion wasn't a cash-rich company by any stretch of the imagination, as most of its money went back into research and development for its popular middleware. EA bought the company for the middleware based on the success that it had licensing the *Quake III* engine. Criterion made more money from licensing its design tools at that time than from sales of its games; RenderWare technology was deemed the new industry-standard software tool (much as Deluxe Paint had been in the Eighties). EA wanted to have this in-house to simplify game development and put each of its studios on an equal footing. Additionally, the technology would be licensed out to EA's competitors. The biggest game developer in the world would now hold the keys to its competitor's ability to develop new games. The press didn't report this very favourably, worried that it would be bad for such a big publisher to be able to wield so much power over its peers. As EA scratched its skin while it rode the storm, worse was to follow when the now infamous EA spouses'





EA provides a great measure of gaming today and yesterday.

blog appeared on the internet. Now EA was being lambasted in the world's press, as well as specialist magazines.

The exasperated wife of an EA employee wrote the blog; unhappy with her husband's treatment by the company and the effect it was having on their family. It opened like so, "EA's bright and shiny new corporate trademark is 'Challenge Everything.' Where this applies is not clear. Churning out one licensed football game after another doesn't sound like challenging anything to me; it sounds like a money farm. To any EA exec that happens to read this, I have a good challenge for you: how about safe and sane labour practices for the people on whose backs you walk for your millions?"

"I am retaining some anonymity here because I have no illusions about what the consequences would be for my family if I were explicit," it continues. "However, I feel no impetus to shy away from sharing our story, because I know that it is too common to stick out among those of the thousands of engineers, artists, and designers that EA employs. Now, it seems, is the 'real' crunch, the one that the producers of this title so wisely prepared their team for by running them into the ground ahead of time. The current mandatory hours are 9am to 10pm – seven days a week – with the occasional Saturday evening off for good behaviour (at 6.30pm). This averages out to an 85-hour workweek. Complaints that these once more extended hours, combined with the team's existing fatigue would result in a greater number of mistakes and an even greater amount of wasted energy were ignored. To put some of this in perspective, I myself consider some figures. If EA truly believes that it needs to push its employees this hard – I believe that they don't, and that it is a skewed operations perspective alone that results in the severity of their crunching, coupled with a certain expected amount of the inefficiency involved in running an enterprise as large as theirs – the solution, therefore, should be to hire more engineers, or artists, or designers, as the case may be. Never should it be an option to punish one's workforce with 90-hour weeks; in any other industry the company in question would find itself sued and out of business so fast its stock wouldn't even have time to tank. In its first weekend, *Madden 2005* grossed $65 million. EA's annual revenue is approximately $2.5 billion. This company is not strapped for cash; their labour practices are inexcusable."

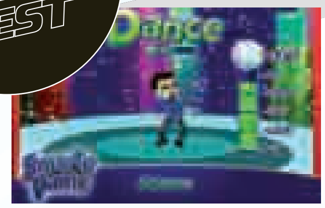
The whole article not only went on for over 5,000 words, but it was also the beginning of a complete revolt. Within days, Joe Straitiff, who had just been let go from EA after an illustrious, if short, career at Maxis, posted a similar piece from a husband working at EA's perspective, citing the same issues from the 'victim's perspective'.



Medal of Honor hits Nintendo's Wii.

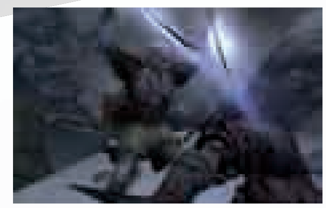
"THE NOW INFAMOUS EA SPOUSES' BLOG LED TO EA BEING LAMBASTED IN THE WORLD'S PRESS, AS WELL AS IN SPECIALIST MAGAZINES"

SIX OF THE BEST



Smarty Pants (Wii)

EA was slow to get product on the Wii, but the end results were only second best to Nintendo's. A quiz game that tailors questions to contestants ages, meaning gamers from eight to eighty can join in. Every player's answers are tracked, and the game adjusts the difficulty to provide continuous stimulation and interactive challenges that are age appropriate. Fun and silly. One day all family games will be like this.



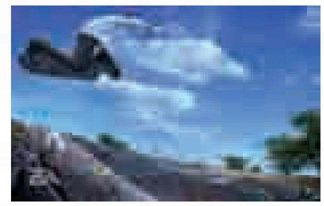
The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers (Xbox, PS2, GameCube, GBA)

EA's first *Lord Of The Rings* game let players take control of the movie trilogy's heroes: Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli, with other members of the Fellowship taking an active role in the game, too. In *The Two Towers*, players battled various orcs and squared off against vicious boss monsters. Solid tactical gameplay elevated this to instant classic status on release.



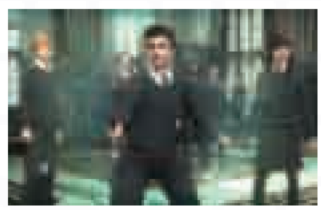
Orcs & Elves (Mobile Phone, DS)

After the ill-fated dalliance with the N-Gage, EA teamed up with id to prove that mobile gaming can be worthwhile. *Orcs & Elves* put gamers into a world of swords and sorcery. Players can wield 11 weapons, as they confront over 35 enemies. With over five hours of gameplay on offer – double that for the DS version – this really was a benchmark for mobiles.



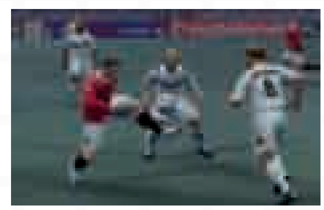
Skate (360, PS3, PC)

Individual style combined with physics-driven animations promised that no two tricks are the same. There's lots of room to pull tricks, explore and find the best spots. You can even capture footage to create and show off your style with friends across the world. Skateboarding without having to get down with the youth. Great. It's worried Activision a bit, too.



Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix (360, PS2, Wii, DS)

Despite being available on everything, the Wii shines in this movie tie-in, because of the wand controller. Using an actual wand to control a wand is a gaming first and one that wasn't lost on anyone that played this. Playing like a series of mini-games held together by the story, this turned out to be a surprising movie tie-in.



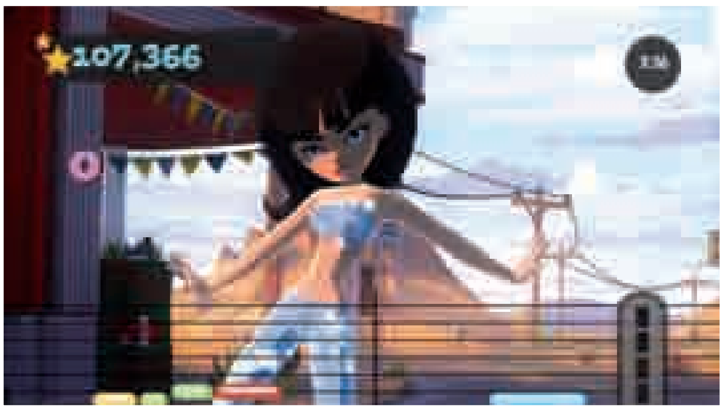
UEFA Champions League (360, PS2)

Using the most recent *FIFA* engine, EA greatly improved the game by adding a brilliant card-trading game to the mix. Trade, buy and swap cards in game or online, then play the cards you've earned during each game. It works fantastically well, and we have the feeling that this is going to be a massive franchise when it finally hits its stride.

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



Above: *Sim City*, another of EA's finest games. **Inset:** It doesn't look like it should be the biggest selling PC game of all time, but it is.

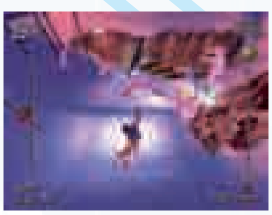


Boogie is typical of the approach EA is now taking with new IP releases.

"Well, a few weeks pass, and some bug shows up in my code at 10pm (I'd left at seven or eight, as I was trying to only work about 40-50 hour weeks and was keeping up with my schedule by working at breakneck speed – but there was no way I was working on weekends, which you were required to do if you were 'behind')," explains Straitiff. "I got a call from another team member asking if I knew what a certain problem was. It clicked, and I gave him a solution that worked, over the phone, in under 15 minutes. Well, the next day I was pulled into another meeting with my supervisor and got yelled at for not being there. He said (even though he denied it in a later meeting) that he didn't have an issue with the quantity or quality of my work (in fact he praised the quality of my work), but said that someone in my 'senior' position (my title was only software engineer not senior engineer, but I've shipped a lot of titles and been in the industry for about six years) should be available a lot more at 'this time in the project'. In fact, I should be working at least 12 hours a day, which I said was unacceptable. I'd do the work given to me, but I certainly wasn't going to sacrifice my family, and certainly not that early in the project. It's okay (not really, but it's a common consensus) to work those kinds of hours the week before a major deadline (E3, alpha, beta, final), but, outside of that ten hours a day should be the absolute max."

These two initial blogs started a revolution inside EA and would eventually result in a class action being brought against the company, where considerable damages were paid. This case was made more ironic because of the early EA mantra to make stars of its programming teams and the tabloid press across America were quick to jump on this. Keith Ramsdale explains how this has affected EA then and now. "It affected us profoundly – and set off several changes in the way we think and work," he says. "EA is the industry leader and gets a lot of the blame for what we know are really industry-wide problems. Most big studio organisations were using the same practices, but EA stopped and said, 'We are wrong and we can do better.' We settled the class action lawsuits with California engineers and artists and changed how we scheduled certain groups of employees, making them eligible for overtime. More broadly, we've set up systems and encouraged managers to be more responsive to employee concerns. Like all studios, we're always going to have 'crunch time' – but there's a lot we can do to support and reward the people who now have to go through it."

One of the main problems EA faced at the time came from the fact it made many acquisitions of smaller studios. Gamers too were unhappy about this. EA effectively mothballed Origin Systems after *Ultima Online*, and kept the company in stasis before winding it up three years later. This would become another key learning point that would shape EA as we know it today. "Looking back, there was plenty of blame to spread around for mismanaging those operations (Bullfrog, Origin, Westwood)," Keith says. "The studios weren't performing and EA didn't have a well-tuned strategy for assimilating new talent. In recent years we've got much better at acquiring and developing new studios – Maxis, Black Box, Criterion and Mythic are more recent examples of independent studios that have flourished under EA management. We



EA arrived at the new millenium with a fun-filled game.

EA TIMELINE 2000-2008

2000 IN A MOVE THAT WOULD ENSURE THE QUALITY OF FUTURE RELEASES, EA LICENCES THE QUAKE ENGINE. IT ALSO RELEASES THE WORLDS BIGGEST SELLING PC GAME, THE SIMS

2001 EA ANNOUNCES THAT TODD MCFARLANE WAS TO CONTRIBUTE ADDITIONAL CONTENT TO ORIGIN SYSTEMS' ULTIMA ONLINE, CREATING A COMPLETELY NEW GAME. THIS GAME WAS ALMOST COMPLETE WHEN THE STUDIO WAS CLOSED

2002 EA STEAL CHRISTMAS IN 2003, DOMINATING THE CHARTS WITH ITS SPORTS TITLES, FIFA 2003 SELLS 2.5 MILLION UNITS IN FOUR MONTHS

2003 EA HITS A RECORD SALES MILESTONE IN 2003 WITH 22 PLATINUM GAMES IN SIX MONTHS.

2004 A DISGRUNTLED EMPLOYEE'S WIFE SHAKES EA TO THE CORE, HER BLOG BECOMES THE MOST READ BLOG ON THE INTERNET FOR OVER TWO WEEKS

2005 EA HELD ITS FIRST ANIMATION COMPETITION FOR GRAPHIC ARTISTS IN CANADA, THE RESPONSE WAS SO OVERWHELMING THAT THE $40,000 FIRST PRIZE WAS SPLIT INTO TWO $20,000 PRIZES BECAUSE THE EXECS COULDN'T CHOOSE AN OUTRIGHT WINNER

2006 EA REVEALS AT E3 ITS INTENTION TO MOVE SERIOUSLY INTO THE MOBILE MARKET AND ANNOUNCES A ROSTER OF WIRELESS GAMES TO BE PLAYED OVER MOBILE PHONES

2007 EA HAS A FOUR-PRONGED REBRAND, DIVIDING THE COMPANY INTO FOUR SEPARATE LABELS WITH A COHESIVE STRATEGY

2008 EA ANNOUNCES A NEW BATTLEFIELD GAME THAT WILL BE FREE TO GAMERS, THE NEW BUSINESS MODEL IS EXPECTED TO RECEIVE REVENUE FROM ADVERTISERS AND THROUGH MICRO TRANSACTIONS

SIX TO RE-MAKE



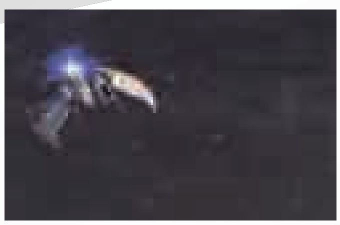
Desert Strike

Desert Strike was absolutely unmissable in the early Nineties, featuring a true to life backstory, amazing weaponry and explosive gameplay, sprinkled with a strategic approach to warfare. The challenge on offer was no slouch either and the game was more than compelling. A game that's crying out for a current-generation remake.



Immercenary

When EA fused art and VR in *Immercenary*, little did it know that it would create one of the first sandbox games. But the FMVs and VR time travel left many reviewers cold. However, for those who have played it, the experience has seldom been bettered. What EA would be able to deliver on new technology is anyones' guess.



Wing Commander

The greatest space opera to reach gaming. Too much for the technology at times, this series went from strength to strength, started well and finished on a high. Sure, each game had flaws, but the magnitude of the game doesn't exist in gaming now. Please EA, put us back into space in high-powered ships and online battles.



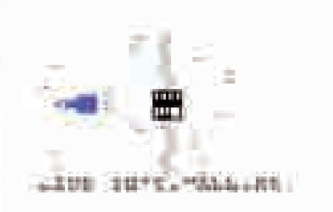
Road Rash

Armed-to-the-teeth motorbike racing, this was one of EA's strongest early titles. The ability to harm your opponent made it very popular. Really, it was an early *Burnout* that EA got complacent with. The time for its return is now, the hardware and the engine is there (*Burnout Paradise*) and the online service is stable. It would be amazing.



Mail Order Monsters

The game that *Pokémon* aspired to be. Build a monster and battle with your mates' monsters. In the Eighties it was great, today it'd be awesome. There hasn't been a good monster game since *Rampage*. Taking the monsters online would be the icing on the cake. An RPG trading game that would let you create and take life on a whim.



M.U.L.E.

For obvious reasons this game would be awesome brought bang up to date. Sensible Software had enormous success with its 'tribute' to *M.U.L.E.*, the 16-bit classic *Mega Lo Mania*. That was 15 years ago now though, and a brand new version of the game, properly updated, would be great. Strategy games have seldom been as rewarding.

"THESE BLOGS STARTED A REVOLUTION INSIDE EA. IT LEARNT ITS LESSONS FAST AND A MORE CONGENIAL CULTURE NOW PERMEATES"

make long-term investments in people and franchises and encourage each operation to develop its own identity."

EA learnt its lessons fast and a more congenial culture now permeates. "EA is filled with extraordinarily passionate people," he says. "We challenge ourselves, and our teams, to assume industry leadership. Like every studio in the industry, we assume each game will hit an inevitable 'crunch time', but we try to manage the project to minimise the stress on the team. Our experience is that 'crunch' is remembered as the worst and the best time of any project. You work late, but the result and the camaraderie that comes with it is extremely rewarding."

EA also had the honour of playing hardball with Microsoft and winning. Initially, EA declined to support Xbox Live, and it was only after Microsoft revised the service that it agreed to publish for the Xbox. "We felt there were some fundamental issues that needed to be resolved around how developers/publishers were compensated for content," reveals Ramsdale. "The whole concept of Live was new and no one had really thought that through. Since then, the hardware manufacturers – including Microsoft – have been very responsive to our concerns." It's worth noting that Microsoft feared a Dreamcast scenario without the EA franchises, and pulled its own sports titles as soon as EA finally arrived on the scene.

So, what of the future for EA? Keith tells us that the rebrand is done. "The four labels are: EA Sports, EA Games, The Sims, and EA Casual Entertainment. Organising into four labels allows us a much tighter focus on each genre and opportunity. Our recent agreement with Hasbro is a good example. Under the old structure, that project wouldn't get much attention, but as part of the Casual label, it's a top priority and it's going to deliver a lot of great entertainment. It's a creative and an economic priority for the label and they're going to make sure it works."

It would appear that after 25 years EA has come full circle, with Ramsdale admitting that it will once again concentrate on new intellectual property. "We have set a major goal of introducing innovative new titles that come from our own studios – we've introduced *Black*, *Skate*, *MySims*, *Boogie*, *Smarty Pants*, *Playground* and many others. Looking ahead we've announced *Spore*, *Army Of Two*, *Warhammer*, *Dead Space*, and others are currently in development. The decision to ramp up our development of new IP came from the recognition that we've got the most talented studio network in the world, with many of the industry's most creative people. They've got a ton of great ideas – games with extraordinary potential. So both as a creative exercise and a business proposition, we've decided to invest in the people who work at EA, to let them create and explore. There's a process for this and it's already delivering some great new IP. We're proud of the new IP coming from our studios, but we're just as proud of epic franchises like *Madden*, *FIFA*, *NBA Live*, *Need For Speed* and others that, year after year, give millions of fans exactly what they want from a game."

Ramsdale is unstoppable when talking about the EA of today and tomorrow and his enthusiasm is really hard to escape. Like a continuous loop he finishes off where EA first began. "Our new CEO John Riccitiello is changing not only the shape of the company, but the culture – we're less arrogant, more innovative and more willing to take creative risks. Within the company there's still a lot of pride. If you look across the number of creative investments EA is making, the number of new games, the platforms we're making them for and the vast number of countries where EA games are being bought, loved and played, you'll see that no one else is doing that. That's a good feeling." Isn't it just, and something we've all hoped to hear.



Command & Conquer Tiberium Wars is soon to be transformed into a FPS.

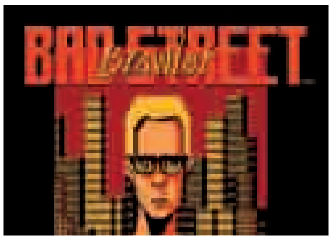
SPECIAL THANKS TO Keith Ramsdale EA VP UK and Ireland and the always helpful Jodie Van Hibb.

retro shamer

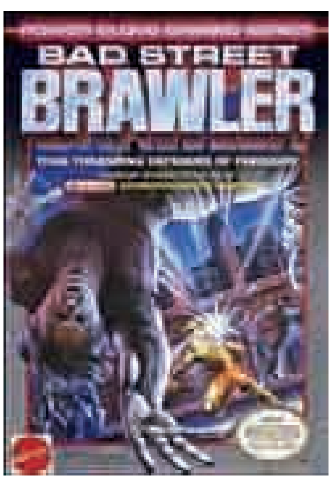
Bad Street Brawler

BAD STREET BRAWLER IS A PRETTY GOOD ASSIMILATION OF EVERYTHING THAT'S EVIL ABOUT THE SIDE-SCROLLING BEAT-'EM-UP, AND NOT IN A COOL, VIOLENT FACIAL-PINCH KIND OF WAY. IN FACT, IT'S SO BAD THAT THE GAME'S DEVELOPER SAW FIT TO THROW IN A RATHER MASSIVE TITULAR CLUE INTO THE GAME WITH REGARDS TO HOW TURDISH IT WAS. STUART HUNT WALKS THE STREETS OF THE ULTIMATE BAD STREET BRAWLER

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** MATTEL
- » **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** DRAGON NINJA



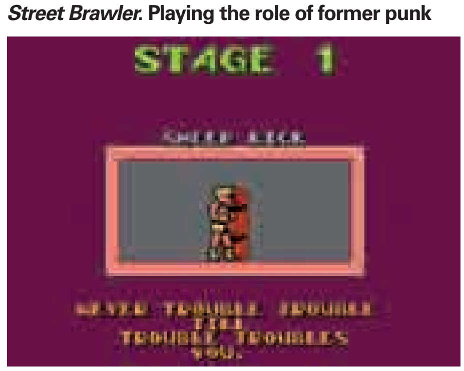
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Cripes, that box art almost makes the game look like a videogame. Yep, it's fair to say that this game went and unscrupulously paraded itself around as such. Duke almost looks believable as a thug-bashing superhero, although why he's dressed like a marathon runner is indeed peculiar. The guy flying at us, after being served a nice right-hand smash, kind of looks like he's wearing a Power Glove. Maybe he metaphorically represents the player, in yet another ingenious hint by the developer that spending 40 quid on this game is like being punched in the ribs by *Hammerfist*.



» Watch out for the gorilla with the banana knuckle duster.

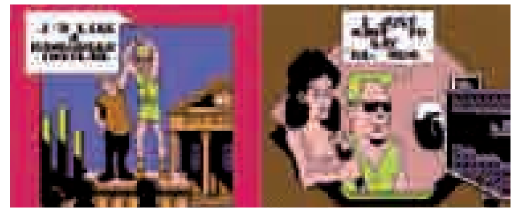
'Never trouble trouble, till trouble troubles you', a brilliant if somewhat daft-sounding parable that's bleated to the gamer before he/she even ventures into the mind-altering screens of *Bad Street Brawler*. Playing the role of former punk rocker turned questionable martial artist Duke Davis, for his daring mission on the bad streets of some fictional made up land, the developer has opted to dress him up like a malnourished Hulk Hogan, sporting obligatory yellow pants, sleeveless vest, boots, blonde hair and 'cool' shades in a bid to essentially demonstrate where the style threshold for wearing garish yellow attire can be found.



» It may look like Duke's posting a letter, but he's molesting his punch bag.

Why Duke has seen fit to leave the affluent world of stardom and notoriety for a life of colourful street violence isn't made clear, but then every element of *Bad Street Brawler* is brilliantly perplexing. *Bad Street Brawler* essentially plays out like the world's most un-PC side-scrolling fighter. Your gamely hero is on a mission, a mission to kick to death any circus midget (who are apparently old ladies throwing pocketbooks) trying to make an honest living flying into the air with dumbbell propellers, any defenceless

POINTLESS PART



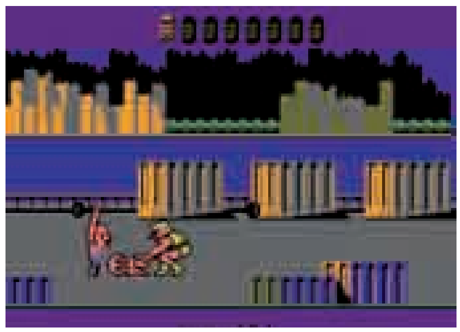
The cut-scenes in the game are truly awful, but in turn, offer a brilliant tutorial of what *not* to say in the following instances: when being interviewed by a television reporter, it would be extremely wise not to take Dirk's lead and say, "I just want to say, 'hi, mom'." And if you ever find yourself in the presence of a scruffily dressed mayor awarding you the key to his city, try to avoid saying, "I'd like a hamburger instead," because you'll sound like an ungrateful, appreciation-inept pr**k.



» These flying moustachioed foes are going to pay with their lives for flying, and for being so moustachioed.



» Duke cowered in fear at the drug dealer's armpit attack.



» And this move is known as 'changing the nappy.'

puppies that want a pat on the head and any and all escaped mountain gorillas who are obviously so spooked by their unfamiliar surroundings they've resorted to throwing bananas rather than forcing them up their nostrils. Yes, that, 'Never trouble trouble' pith certainly goes spinning head first from a twenty-storey building into a seriously unstable nuclear warhead in the first four seconds of this game.

We do salute the level of believability that Beam Software has fused into the game though, by making us feel completely and utterly convinced that Duke is a newcomer to world of martial arts. A kick that looks like he's rubbing a nest of ants from under the bottom of his boot, and a 'trip' move that involves him squatting to the ground, tying his enemies shoelaces together and then rolling them into a ball, secures whatever art of fighting Duke Davis is currently an apt pupil of as one of life's many mysteries.

The painful progression through each stage of *Bad Street Brawler* awards you with a strange cut-scene of Duke throwing dumbbells, baseball bats and bananas – which he gets from his fallen enemies – into a blue dumpster. Now whether or not this is character-development filler – showing Duke trying to hide the evidence of all that merciless killing – is never made clear. The game also throws in more of those brilliantly guff quotes like, "The race is not always to the swiftest, not the battle to the strongest… but that's the way to bet," to confuse us before mixing up Duke's move list for no apparent reason other than letting us try out our three restless moves on a punch bag. Yes, there are 15 moves at Duke's disposal, drip fed to us in threes over the course of each of the game's stages. But why? Well, to add a bit of move-variety to the game, of course.

The NES is home to a few astonishingly bad and fugly looking games, but at least *Bad Street Brawler* does exactly what it says on the tin. And we suppose a certain iota of respect must be awarded for that. This game was one of two games built specifically to make use of the Nintendo Power Glove peripheral (*Super Glove Ball* being the other), further inducing this game's worthless existence and resoundingly proving that kicking a dwarf just because he exists is actually more offensive than it sounds.

[A WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER]

Can you dig it? Duke Davis here, first I wanna say, 'hi, mom'. Second, I have a word for all my loyal and loving fans out there. If you ever find yourself facing immeasurable odds and dwarfs with dumbbells, the greatest triumph that one human being can have is to use their fists, feet and inner self, combine them and get them to work in unison to challenge peace prohibition on the streets. It can feel exhausting and sometimes it might even get you down some nights, but I find wearing yellow works for me, perhaps wearing yellow can work for you too? Peace dudes.



"AT LEAST BAD STREET BRAWLER DOES EXACTLY WHAT IT SAYS ON THE TIN"

MDK

Reaching an impressive number nine in our top 25 run-'n'-gun list back in issue 44, MDK was many things: experimental, beautiful and genre-defying to a point that helped set gaming precedents and gave us the greatest acronym run-around in videogame history before going on to become a cult PC classic. Stuart Hunt speaks to the game's creator, David Perry, about MDK



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY

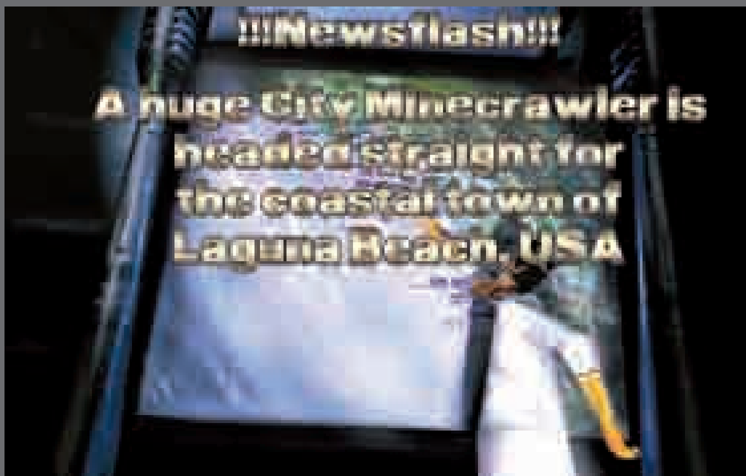
» **DEVELOPER:** SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

» **RELEASED:** 1997

» **GENRE:** RUN-'N'-GUN

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID





» Laguna Beach is where Shiny's offices could be found. Best scarper then chaps.



» Kurt is fired from the Jim Dandy towards huge Minecrawlers, but must avoid their green searchlights, or it's bad news.

However it is you view the two 'proper' *Earthworm Jim* games, you could never argue that their irreverence, humour and bawdy cartoon look provided a timeless summation of what was so endearing about videogames of the Nineties. *MDK* was creator David Perry's first foray into 3D gaming, a hesitant jump that would draw a faint line in the sand, showing when it was that videogames decided to get all burnished and real-looking. *MDK* isn't to be blamed or praised for spearheading this particular shift in gaming though; the Pentium processor was the catalyst – David Perry and his talented troupe simply proved that the shift could be bridged brilliantly. The story of an unlikely hero supplanted into a power-giving suit, with more of that iconic Shiny imagery and certainly no shortage of that trademark Shiny humour, *MDK* would share more in common with a two-dimensional annelid than any fancy free-roaming polygon game series released after it.

A high expectancy to deliver something to equal the popularity of *Earthworm Jim* was never going to be an easy task. After all Jim, by that time, had amassed himself a toy line, a Marvel comic, an animated television series and even had a big Hollywood Studio interested in turning his life story into a motion picture. The earthworm had segued from popular videogame to very profitable brand name.

Behind the scenes David Perry had amassed the best 2D development team in the industry and devised a clever method to generate smoother animation from the Mega Drive. The result of this 'compression system', as it was known, would allow his team to harness more frames of animation than other developers coding for the machine at that time.

"It kind of gave us an edge, allowing our artists to go that little bit further than people would normally be able to go at that time," explains David. "To solve that programming problem was actually pretty complicated because we were doing it by hand, so I had a guy come in and write a tool that would enable us to convert the data from the artist to the way that I needed it compressed. Basically, then the team could just make as many frames of animation as they needed because it was all on very compressed data. This gave us that smooth look that you wouldn't have seen in any other game. That was one of our secrets at the time."

"A TECHNIQUE WE USED WAS TO HAVE ANIMATORS REUSE ANIMATION FRAMES, WHICH IS A TECHNIQUE THAT REAL ANIMATORS USE. THIS WAS BENEFICIAL AS IT MADE OUR GAMES FEEL EVEN SMOOTHER"

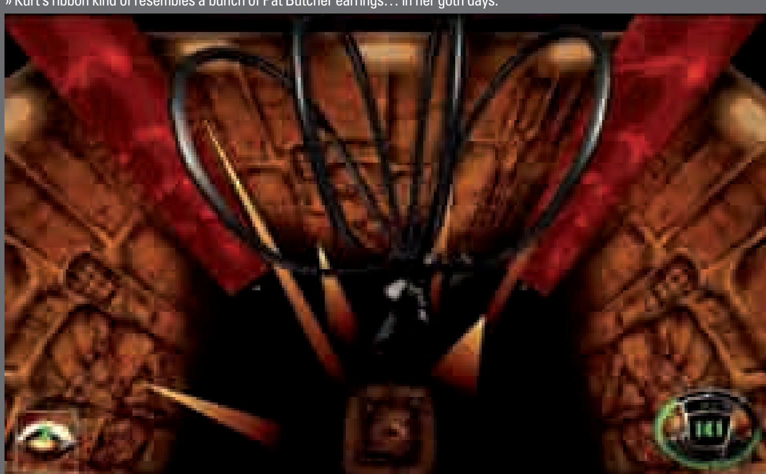
DAVID PERRY ON SOME OF THE TECHNIQUES USED TO GET MDK LOOKING SO GOOD

"Another technique we used was to have the animators reuse animation frames, which is actually a technique that real animators will use," he continues. "This was also beneficial as it allowed our games to feel even smoother as there were extra frames of animation inside them that didn't take up any memory."

It now becomes clearer as to why it was David became anxious when his team wanted to go 3D. This unique technique that Shiny had developed would prove useless to them in 3D realms. Taking that inevitable leap would be like David driving a hatchet into his leading arm and forcing himself to paint with the other, but that day would have to come eventually.

"Before *MDK*'s development there were a few people experimenting with 3D graphics, and it was obvious to me

» Kurt's ribbon kind of resembles a bunch of Pat Butcher earrings… in her goth days.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

EARTHWORM JIM
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES, MEGA CD, GAME GEAR, GAME BOY, PC, SMS, GBA
YEAR: 1994

MESSIAH
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2000

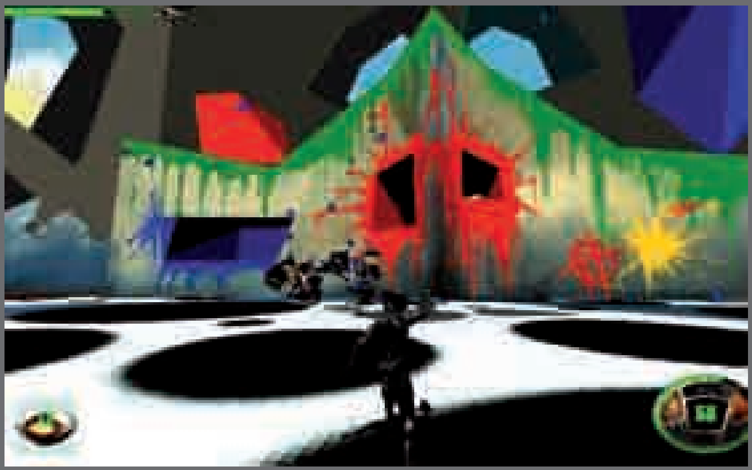
SACRIFICE (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 2000



MDK



» *MDK* still looks amazing today; absolutely stunning.



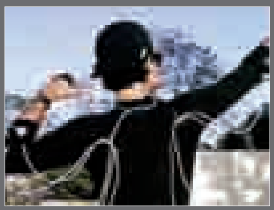
» Kurt was beginning to regret throwing his house-warming party.

"WITH MDK WE PITCHED IT AS DOING A GAME ABOUT A GUY THAT JUMPS OUT OF A SPACECRAFT AND FLIES TO EARTH WITH A SNIPER-RIFLE HELMET"

DAVID PERRY ON THE FREEDOM THAT HE AND NICK BROODY WERE AFFORDED IN THE EARLY DAYS OF DEVELOPMENT

HOW TO PITCH A MIGHTY, DEFT KILLER BALL

Shiny initially struggled to find a backer for *MDK*. However, faith in the game, perseverance and the talents and vision of Shiny's two lead artists would thankfully win through in the end. "We pitched *MDK* to the company that we wanted to fund it using storyboards," recalls David. "We laid the storyboards onto the table and then invited the executives in, and they literally said, 'Look, we don't get it, we're so sorry but we're not willing to fund this game.' We didn't know what to do; we had bet the farm on this thing. But that was when Nick and Bob rendered it to video to show them what we're talking about. They rendered the exact same storyboards and we called the execs back for a second meeting. Then they were like, 'This looks great, we want to do a toy line; we want to do a TV show.' That's advice I give to people still to this day: don't leave it up to the people in the room to imagine the game for you, go in and show them exactly what you're talking about."



that we could stick our head in the sand each year or we were going to have to go 3D," admits David. "I was worried because the guys I had were some of the best 2D guys in the business, I was extremely proud of my team because of what they had achieved in the 2D world."

David, inevitably, took that jump by investing some of his own money into the purchase of expensive Silicon Graphics terminals and 3D software, but watching his team get to grips with the new utilities wasn't easy.

"It was like watching people paint with broken hands, I mean they were just banging their heads against the table, they just hated it. And you have to remember this was back when 3D Studio Max was pretty junky, so you've got this team who are used to drawing things with a pencil trying to use this thing. It was very difficult for me to watch," explains David.

"I want to do a game where I can shoot someone in the eye from a mile away." It was these slightly unsettling words from Nick Broody that sparked the genesis of *MDK*. This was typical of Nick though; a throwaway idea, a scribble on a napkin, even the gratification found from shooting somebody in the eye a mile away, could be all it took for a game concept to take shape in his head.

"Nick Broody was my real partner through all of the years," recalls David. "We met up by chance in England when he happened to be working on a project that I started to work on, and from that point all the games I made in England, all the Spectrum games anyway, we worked on together. The first game that we ever got started on was *Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper*. It was a big game, with big gorgeous graphics, so you could understand why I was attracted to Nick's talent. When I later got a job offer in the US, while working on *The Terminator*, I flew over and recommended that they hire him. He was flown over soon after."

"Back in those days when I was working with Nick, we had the freedom to do whatever we wanted because someone would always publish it," he continues. "With *MDK* we pitched it as doing a game about a guy that jumps out of a spacecraft and flies to Earth with a sniper-rifle helmet. Not a lot of developer's get that experience; often, they get treated as a resource. You're a programmer and we're going to move you from project to project – usually emergency to emergency – and they never get to go crazy on something that they think is interesting or funny."

The ethos of *MDK* was built from the idea that, in videogames, the player couldn't aim or shoot at enemies at any kind of distance. David and Nick felt the best way to solve this problem would be to think up a way of bringing enemies closer to the player. Eventually a sniper gun was added to the equation, but this would raise its own issues.

» The sniper rifle allows you to shoot enemies in the eye from a mile away, just as Nick Broody had wanted.





» Kurt was a massive fan of Damien Hirst's work.



» *MDK* invented the sniper rifle. Well, in a videogame sense at least.

"The technical problem was accuracy," admits David. "3D graphics at that time were reasonably inaccurate because people were always cheating with the math, so it became difficult to accurately shoot someone in the eye or on the hand. Our concept was that if you shot someone in the eye from a mile away they were dead immediately, no messing around. But then what happened, being the typical Shiny game, is that we would have humour with enemies mooning you because they didn't think you could shoot them from that distance."

The sniper rifle has since become a staple of the videogame diet. Pick up any first-person shooter and you can bet your last dollar that in your inventory you will eventually come by a high-precision weapon. *MDK*'s sniper rifle was markedly unique to the others that followed, as it formed the angular helmet of your protagonist Kurt and his line of sight when you switched the game into the first-person 'sniper mode'. The scope on the helmet was also extremely powerful, allowing the player to zoom from one end of an 'arena' to the other and pick off the jibing, arse-brandishing Grunts from a sizeable distance. As well as a sniper rifle, Kurt's suit also had a 'coil chute': a precarious-looking parachute made of ribbons that would automatically retract, giving enough breaking power to slow Kurt's descent and let him glide safely from high platforms.

Kurt's leather suit would play its own significant part in the look and success of *MDK*. It gave the game a dark and beautiful beacon to catch the eyes on magazine pages, coupling perfectly the game's peculiar story and gothic imagery, which served well to pique the curiosity of gamers. David admits that during the development of *MDK* there was a constant debate as to whether the suit was symbiotic, alien, alive, or solely the fruits of technological advancement and the fertile imagination of an eccentric scientist.

"IT WAS LIKE WATCHING PEOPLE PAINT WITH BROKEN HANDS, I MEAN THEY WERE JUST BANGING THEIR HEADS ON THE TABLE, THEY JUST HATED IT"

DAVID PERRY ON WATCHING HIS TEAM GET TO GRIPS WITH 3D SOFTWARE

"It was never truly defined whether it was alive or not," explains David. "It was created by a scientist and it definitely has its own characteristics but it didn't have the power to get up and run away. It was alive in the sense that at that time we really didn't understand that there could be a material that would react in the way that we envisioned so it had to have some life to it, or some intelligence. But it didn't have a heartbeat."

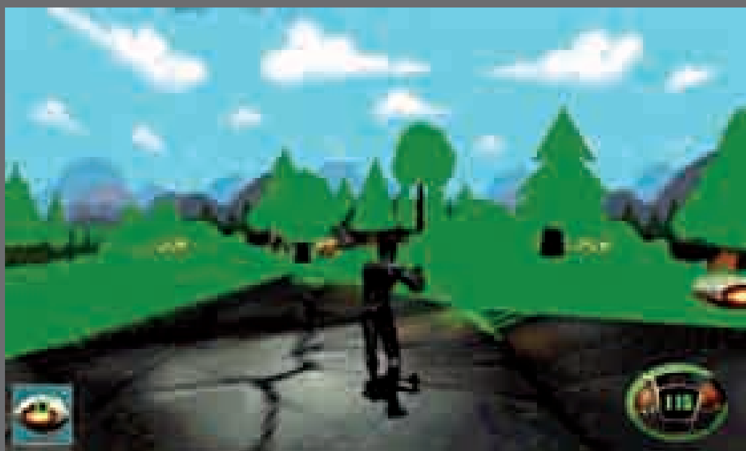
"The suit was made up of this scaly black material," David continues. "And the concept was that when Kurt got shot the suit would tense up at the exact spot where he had been shot, so he would receive the hit and the pain, but the bullet wouldn't actually penetrate to his skin. This was perfect for our game design because getting shot hurts Kurt, but it doesn't kill him right out. Ironically, I recently heard that the army has actually developed a material that does this now, where, if you shoot it, it will actually tighten up right at the point of the bullet's contact. Also, I have a piece of material that they're using for snowboarders, and it's a similar thing. It's a material that stiffens up in moments of impact, which is exactly the kind of stuff we were imagining way back in *MDK*."

» One of Kurt's many enemies in *MDK*. It looks like it's going to be a tough job, this saving the world malarkey.



MDK2

For the game's sequel, Interplay handed *MDK* over to RPG stalwarts BioWare (*Baldur's Gate* and *Mass Effect*). While the game retained the dark look and three central characters of the original, elements had been tweaked. For starters, BioWare incorporated puzzle elements to *MDK* and allowed players to control Kurt, Max and Dr Fluke. *MDK2* is notoriously hard-going, often touted as being one of the most arduous games to finish. "BioWare did what BioWare does," says David. "They made a BioWare *MDK* game and they are really talented at what they do. They are just hardcore RPG-style guys, and so for them to make an *MDK* game it had to get more complicated. On the other hand, that's not where we would have gone at all. We would have gone in search of new hooks (like the sniper rifle, for instance) and probably gone for a lot more graphics and just more humour."



» Don't worry. None of the above is actually real.



» This is Kurt looking rather fetching in his coil suit.

Kurt's parachute led David to the possibilities of adding the aerial aspects to the game. And then it was also decided that a small section of the sniper helmet could be removed by Kurt and used as a sidearm.

We decided to ask David about the similarities of his three most prevalent heroes: Jim, Kurt and Bob (the cherubic protagonist in his *MDK* follow-up, *Messiah*), all unlikely heroes – earthworm, janitor and baby – who find strength from inside a suit. We wanted to know whether this was a running theme for Shiny or simply a tidy coincidence.

"We tend to base things on themes and I'm slowly beginning to understand what themes I like," says David. "And one of the themes is weak to strong and strong to weak and I think that is a partial videogame design trick that adds a lot to games. It's really fun to have people feel really strong and then suddenly feeling very fragile, and to have them go through that emotional curve. The higher and the lower the spikes you can make in that curve, the more fun it is. It's fun to know you have a plasma gun and smart bombs inside your back pocket and know that when the game gets tough you can pull them out. But then it's equally as fun when it's all stripped away from you and you don't have anything, and you know that this is a really hairy situation, so when you do make it through you feel really great about it. What's even better is in a certain moment, in the middle of the mayhem, we suddenly give you everything back you needed, you get back all your equipment and weapons and now you can just go nuts on everybody. We found that theme start to resonate in the work that we've done over the years."

> "ONE OF THE THEMES IS WEAK TO STRONG AND STRONG TO WEAK AND I THINK THAT IS A PARTIAL VIDEOGAME DESIGN TRICK THAT ADDS A LOT TO GAMES" DAVID PERRY ON THE THEME OF HIS CHARACTERS FINDING STRENGTH WITHIN A SUIT

MDK's backstory is easily Shiny's most surrealist narrative and centres on three very juxtaposing central characters: Max, a four-armed robotic dog, scientist Dr Fluke and the doctor's janitor, Kurt Hectic. The story goes that Dr Fluke Hawkins built a space station, named the Jim Dandy, to prove the existence of 'Flange Orbits' to his fellow scientist chums. He persuades his janitor, using Hungarian goulash, to accompany him on his mission.

» An idiot's guide to motion capture, even down to the 'special coffee and the exotic magazines'.



» We'd love to see a third *MDK* game. Imagine what Kurt's adventure would look like now.



However, their existence is soon debunked. Afraid that returning empty-handed would result in him receiving untold amounts of ridicule by the science community, he remains on the space station and begins building a nifty little robot dog with four arms, who he calls Max.

As fate would have it, the good scientist would discover a strange phenomenon up in space; peculiar bolts of energy that disperse gargantuan machines known as Minecrawlers, that are capable of sucking a planet barren of its resources. With the Earth's military completely obliterated by the alien invaders, and the planet on the brink of destruction, Dr Fluke steps in by unveiling an experimental coil suit capable of sapping 'bullets, bees and very small sticks'. Kurt is then selected to don the black, leathery armour and is fired back down to Earth on his Mission to Deliver Kindness.

There was a considerable amount of media speculation surrounding the actual meaning of the three letters *MDK*. We've already mentioned a couple of different interpretations to be thrown at the three letters, both of which are hinted at in the game's manual. The game, however, never actually solidifies any meaning. The ambiguity surrounding the moniker soon became a fortuitous viral-campaign, which David and his team were more than willing to play along with. '*Murder Death Kill*', '*Mother's Day Kisses*', '*Mrs Donkey Kong*', are just some of the ideas and conspiracy theories that would continue to flood in.

There still exists a veil of confusion over what those three letters were originally intended to represent, so we put the question to David. Admittedly, the words didn't come easily, the question was clichéd, the words predictable and our voice apologetic. We put hand into pocket and produced a tatty old million dollar question, but David answered it cordially.

"The original pitch video that we did was originally called *Murder Death Kill* and our tag line was that 'on a good day 2.5 billion people will die'," he says. "So we had gone for this 'world is absolutely screwed' scenario; this alien menace is going to literally split Earth in half and destroy it. Now the title was *Murder Death Kill*, not in the sense that you're doing all the killing, but in the sense that this is what's happening to the world and your job was to try to save it. However, the toy company that we were working with at the time was like 'are you kidding me, Toy's "R" Us are going to stock *Murder Death Kill* toys?' So we joked around and said it could stand for something else and it developed into this marketing ploy where no one could ever define it. If you actually asked me at the time my official answer was that it stood for the three lead characters in the game: Max, Dr Fluke and Kurt. But yes, *Murder Death Kill* is what we originally wanted to call the game."

"WE HAD GONE FOR THIS 'WORLD IS ABSOLUTELY SCREWED' SCENARIO; THIS ALIEN MENACE IS GOING TO LITERALLY SPLIT EARTH IN HALF AND DESTROY IT"

DAVID PERRY ON THE ORIGINAL PREMISE OF MDK

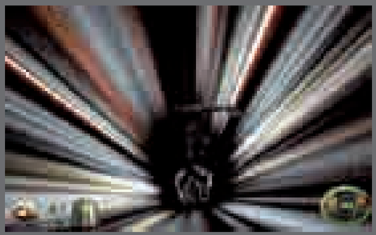
MDK became a cult hit, garnered critical acclaim in magazine pages and sold well enough to keep funding David and the projects that he wanted to make. It was never a breakout hit for the PC – as in the likes of *Quake* and *Half-Life* – and David believes that was due to *MDK* being primarily third-person and existing when FPS was the most raffish genre on the platform.

"During a speech about some of the stuff we were doing, I had this slide that said *MDK* was number one in ten countries, but it was these ten countries that you've never even heard of," he says. "We joked about it. It was doing well, but not what we would've hoped. But these games live on, like *Earthworm Jim*. I still get asked about *Earthworm Jim* all the time, it just amazes me how you make a game like that and how it lives on in people's heads."

» Dr Fluke's suit was designed to be able to sap 'bullets, bees and very small sticks.' Ideal for saving the world.

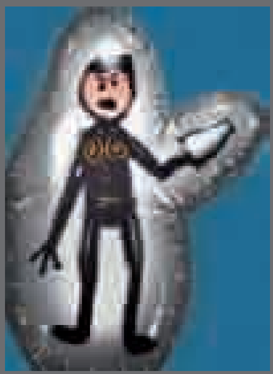


» *MDK's* Kurt is quite possibly one of the coolest videogame characters of all time. And you just got to love that suit.



MOVIE DEAL ON THE KARDS?

As a resident of California, David lives in the epicentre of the movie industry. So it should come as no surprise then to learn that there was interest in bringing both of his most revered creations to the screen. "I had a director call me and say 'I want to do the *Earthworm Jim* movie and all I need is the rights to do it.' I think he was signed with Columbia, so it meant the movie would have had to be distributed by them. He was from The Jim Henson Company and worked on all the puppets. So I went to Universal and, of course, they didn't agree to it. That shows how naive I was back then. With *MDK* though we basically got a toy and a television show deal at the time, and I did all the leg work to get the whole thing sorted out. We were going to do it CG. There was one show called *Reboot* and it was a complete CG television kids' show. The team that made the show was called Mainframe Entertainment and I wanted them to do something similar for *MDK*. The deal was set up and I stood in Interplay's office with the head of the toy company with the cheque in his hand, but Interplay turned the deal down. It was one of the most embarrassing days of my career. We were all standing there about to celebrate that we had a videogame, a television show and a toy line and the guy who was making the final decision didn't want to do it. It was a dark day that day."



» During the game Kurt can throw this quirky inflatable doppelganger into the mix to distract the Grunts.





MATTHEW SMITH

AFTER YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, THE CREATOR OF MANIC MINER AND JET SET WILLY IS BACK LIVING AT THE FAMILY HOME IN LIVERPOOL WHERE HE CODED THOSE TWO SPECTRUM CLASSICS. MATTHEW SMITH AND HIS MUM GAVE PAUL DRURY A UNIQUE THROUGH-THE-KEYHOLE EXPERIENCE. HERE ARE 13 SCENES FROM A LOST WEEKEND

'This room was piled high with papers and the dog was always coming in and pissing on them,' explains Matthew.

'That's a lie!' protests his mum. 'My dog was very good.'

'Right, I must have been doing it myself,' says Matt.

'It was more likely to be one of the cats,' suggests mum.

'It must have had an enormous bladder, then,' he mutters.

The three of us are standing in the room where *Jet Set Willy* was written. The workstation which once housed a TRS-80 Model 3, a five-meg hard drive and a Spectrum, has been replaced by a glass display cabinet. Four porcelain swans, heads bent, sit atop it. And we're trying to determine which of the family pets urinated on the maps of Willy's mansion.

'Anyway mum, they were your cats.'

Mum suspects that Matthew never really liked any of her animal friends. 'I left that Labrador here one day and Matthew tried to swap it for an Alsatian.'

He chuckles, sheepishly. 'I tried to take it for a walk and it just wasn't a walking dog. So I tried to swap it for one that was.'

'His problem was he was born totally brilliant,' says mum.

We're sitting round the kitchen table now, sharing Guinness and watching the ashtray fill up.

'When he went to school at four, they gave him a reading age of 13 and a half. He sailed through primary school doing what he wanted to do. That's not necessarily good. He learned to read himself, sitting in his pram. You'd be wheeling him down the road and he'd be reading the adverts in the shops. If he didn't know a word, he'd ask what it was. At three he could read a newspaper. That was his party piece: Look Matthew's reading the paper!'



» We noticed this master copy of *Jet Set Willy II* underneath a Guinness can on Matt's desk. He's promised not to tape over it.

'Now I'm 42 and I'm not allowed to climb a ladder in case I fall off and hurt myself,' observes Matt, dryly.

Mum waves the remark away. 'Well, that's your mother.'

'Oh yes, he was one of these self-contained kids that you want to say, "Go out and play with your friends." But no, he was happy with his own company. Which to a mother isn't a particularly good thing.'

Mum and Matthew exchange a glance and a smile.

'He'd show me these drawings, but not knowing what a computer game was, it didn't mean anything. I mean, they didn't really exist.'

Matt nods. 'I was working out how to make games before I had a computer, scribbling on graph paper at the back of the class. My first game design was actually Jimmy Carter in a rowing boat being chased by rabbits.'

I begin to speculate whether this was an early indication of his slightly surreal game design tendencies, before Matthew points out it was based on an actual incident where the US President was subject to an unprovoked attack from a killer swamp rabbit while out fishing.

'I drew the graphics for that, but there was no way to program it. There weren't really computers at the time.'

'His stepfather bought him his first computer,' interjects mum. It's the only time the man who also gave Matthew the surname Smith is mentioned.

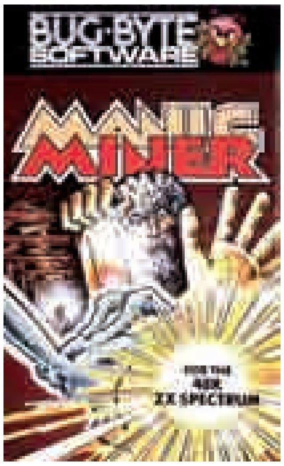
'That was the Tandy in 1979,' confirms Matt. 'I'd first seen *Space Invaders* in the leisure centre where they filmed the stadium scenes for *Chariots Of Fire*. They couldn't get enough extras so they had to use cardboard cutouts. That machine is what got me thinking. When I got my TRS-80, I thought, right I'll play some *Space Invaders*, but I just couldn't get a good version. That was a motivation…'

I open up the draft of Adrian Robson's book, *Miner Willy – From Rags To Riches* at the page featuring *Delta Tau One*, Matt's first published game.

'Ah, my version of *Galaxian*, yeah. In machine code in 4K. On a 1 MHz machine. You don't want to go there. And you certainly don't want to play *Galaxian*.'



» Matt at his *JSW* workstation, complete with a Tandy Model 4 and a homemade cable to squirt the code over to his trusty Spectrum.



» The original *Manic Miner* cover from when Smith was still at Bug-Byte.



» A visit to the New Brighton arcades of his youth in 2006.

He wipes the remains of some Guinness from his top lip and grins like a Cheshire Catweazle.

'I wrote it, showed it all my friends in the Tandy shop and sent it to Molimerx in Bexhill-on-Sea. They were the only publisher of TRS-80 games back then. I got a letter of acceptance back saying they'd stick it in their catalogue, though I think they accepted everything. The catalogue was about that thick…'

Matt holds up his fingers to indicate telephone directory girth.

'It retailed at £14.95, which was pretty much the normal price and I think they paid 20 per cent of retail. I got a cheque for close to 50 quid so that means they sold, what, fifteen copies?'

Matt squints at the screenshot and reads the '© M. Smith' aloud.

'Maybe I should have chased them for a second cheque,' he muses.

So when did you realise that your lad had talent?

'Oh I always knew he had something, that he had great ability,' says mum proudly.

'I think it was when I was putting cheques into her bank account because I didn't have one myself,' offers Matt.

'You never did that!'

'Alright it didn't happen, I wasn't there.'

'That £3,000 you made from *Valhalla*…'

'*Styx*,' Matthew corrects her.

'That went on a new computer and a ski trip for you and Patrick,' mum reminds him.

Ah, the Italian holiday where the first sketches for *Manic Miner* were pencilled into that red notebook? They both nod and begin to roll up fresh cigarettes.

'Patrick was the son of a family friend, the family that first introduced us to Wallasey,' remembers mum. 'He had the same wacky sense of humour as Matthew.'

'He's a hypnotherapist in Kingston on Thames now,' observes Matt.

'I remember when he finished *Manic Miner*,' says mum. 'He copied it on to this tape, put his coat on and ran off to take it where it should be. It was his from start to finish.' We're all in the front room, next to the desk that a 16-year-old Matt must have jumped up from, clutching that precious code before dashing outside. His very own 'eureka!' moment.

'Every now and again I'd take it over to Bug-Byte and meet up with Chris Cannon and Steve, some friends from Tandy. Not that often, maybe two or three times. It only took eight weeks.'

So was it all yours, Matt? Did they offer you any feedback or contribute ideas?

'Nah, all the suggestions had been talked about previously, before I started, with Alan Maton. He came up with the name. The game we were talking about was a lot more like *Space Panic*. There would have been digging and going up and down ladders and stuff. I think I got the jumping thing working first and decided that was enough. A jumping game is simpler to do. And I said, "Look, I can make ladders you can jump up!" As it happens the platform game I'm doing at the moment for phones has proper climbing…'

'He was going to have a year out before he went into sixth form just to have a go at it and of course success came like that, almost overnight.' Mum shakes her head and taps the ash from her roll up. 'The instant success and the instant money did worry me at that age. Money can be a dangerous thing. Too much too soon. Mothers see a broader picture.'

Matthew throws his head back and looks at the ceiling. 'I say not enough and not soon enough.'

'Of course I was worried you were doing too much partying,' says mum. 'All these hangers on saying, "Are you coming for a drink?" and, "Are you buying?"'

Matt leans against the door to the lounge. The very same lounge where he wrote *Jet Set Willy*. By this time, the largest room in the whole house had become Matt's office space and also his unofficial staging area.

Matt nods. 'Had half the world in this room. Starting with Alan behind me, prodding me, saying, "Go on, do another screen…"'

'At that point, Matthew had lost his individuality, his freedom, everything really, to them. He was the goose that was going to lay the golden eggs.'

'I was property.'

But Matt, you were a director of the company. Surely the idea of setting up Software Projects was that you could no longer be pushed around or ignored?

"THE INSTANT SUCCESS AND THE INSTANT MONEY DID WORRY ME AT THAT AGE. MONEY CAN BE A DANGEROUS THING. TOO MUCH, TOO SOON. MOTHERS SEE A BROADER PICTURE"

MATTHEW SMITH'S MUM

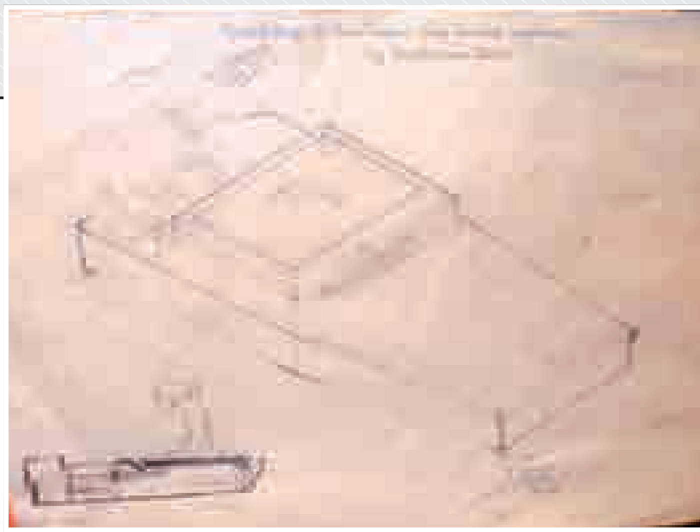


» 'Not as good as Bill Hogue's', concludes Matt of his *Galaxian* clone *Delta Tau One*.



» Matt in his new computer room. 'I've taken to sleeping on the sofa again, just like the old days.'

MATTHEW SMITH



» Mother and son mull over those pre-Game Boy designs for a handheld computer.



'That was the plan,' he says, forcing a smile. 'But 33 per cent is a minority share. I was still on my own.'

Mum has her own theory. 'By the time he'd done *Jet Set Willy*, he was tired, he needed a break for a while, but the pressure was on to do the next game. Anything creative can't just be churned out to order, but the money went to Alan's head.'

Matt looks at his mum. 'To be fair it went to everyone's head. Absolutely everyone's.'

Mum returns from upstairs holding a page from a large sketchpad. It's from 1984 and is entitled: 'Optimal Design for Home Computer using available components by Matthew from Earth.' The screen resolution is marked as 320x200. A side-on view suggests a joystick could be attached in place of a keypad. There's a cartridge port, with a slot that looks all ready to accept Interface One-sized carts. It looks uncannily like a prototype for Nintendo's original Game Boy, which didn't appear till five years later. Did you show this anyone, Matt?

'Oh no. This is all secret. I had a planner's chest full of secret designs,' he says.

This reminds mum of another enterprising chap. 'That bloke who won *The Apprentice* said he'd always admired Alan Sugar since his dad had bought him an Amstrad and he'd played *Jet Set Willy*. Oh, I felt a tingle of pride when I heard that,' she beams.

Matt is less than enthused. 'Every time I see bloody Alan Sugar I think you owe me 10p for every one of those phones you sold with my game on it.'

Mum ignores him. 'You know we had all sorts of press round back then. Thames Television rang him up and asked him to go on *Tiswas*, but he never did.'

'I was too busy by then,' says Matt. 'Or too closeted.'

Mum has headed off to bingo for the evening and we're crouched round the laptop watching the walkthrough of *Manic Miner*. Suddenly Matt notices an anomaly – the Bug-Byte amoebatrons are gone, but the Software Projects' logo doesn't appear on The Warehouse screen.

'Ah, this could be a very late Bug-Byte version, or a very early Software Projects version,' he says, with a knowing wag of his finger. 'With Bug-Byte, I'd take the tape myself up three floors to the tape duplicators. They had a whole floor at Canning Place. They'd stick my cassette on their posh tape deck and played it loads and loads of times onto one big master, these massive ten-inch reels and they used that to copy at high speed onto cassettes. That master would be going over the tape heads all day, so when it wore out they'd come and get me to make a new tape. I'd get the latest version off the Tandy and squirt it onto the Spectrum and that became the new master. And I'd change things. Quite often. That's how bugs disappear! I don't think there are any bugs in *Manic Miner* because of that. Loads in *Jet Set Willy*. That wasn't released, it escaped…'

He relights his roll up and continues. '*Jet Set Willy* was almost done when we set up Software Projects.'

You mean the mansion was all sketched out?

'Nah, that didn't really happen. I'd do a level and stick it next to that

» **Left to right:** » Little Matthew in his childhood bedroom. Close your eyes and you can see the colours, man… » Matt at Nottingham's Screenplay Festival in 2005, talking to your curly haired correspondent. » Available on your mobile soon?







one and then do another. That's why the map doesn't really make any sense. It was never drawn as one in the first place.'

That explains the odd architecture but what about the possessed Swiss Army knives, the deadly puddings, the pig metamorphosis and the array of inanimate objects brought disturbingly to life?

'That could be the mushrooms,' he suggests.

'Cake!' Matt declares definitively, while holding up his half-eaten doughnut triumphantly.

When I explained **Retro Gamer** readers had posted questions for him online, he immediately signed up for our forums and is now pondering such quandaries as, 'Cake or Death', which cheese to serve at retro gaming events and just who is the greatest Timelord.

He takes an especially long time considering whether he's ever been embarrassed by his cult status, before deciding, 'I enjoy it is the simple answer. I can't think of any embarrassing situations it's put me in. I mean I've had people say [he adopts a high-pitched squeak] "Matthew Smith! Sign this piece of paper for me!" Someone even asked me to sign their Spectrum once.'

Erm, that was me Matt. Does that make us all sad fanboys?

'I'm just saying I've never done it to anyone else,' he winks.

Matt reaches for his lighter. 'Let's see, how much can I say…'

I'm trying to get some details on the mobile phone game he's alluded to, but things remain vague.

'I haven't thought about it for a while. I've got three different versions of the main characters, according to what the artistic and legal imperative is,' he says mysteriously. He faffs around for five minutes, changing the hard drive of his PC at one point, and finally gets a set of sprites up on screen, including an undulating caterpillar and a waltzing pig apparently balancing a milk bottle on its snout. 'Not exactly something from my back catalogue, but very similar in style. Could be '*Mooner Wally*'.'

I completely miss the point of this copyright-skirting name change and ask if a game around flashing might expose Matt to a little controversy.

'My first thought was having him go to the moon, but a guy who shows his arse – yeah!'

He laughs loudly and continues to giggle when I show him some screenshots that **Retro Gamer**'s own Richard Burton discovered buried in Matt's old website.

'*Oh Diana!*. Ah, that was a platform game in Flash; based on a character done by a Sri Lankan comedienne I met on this programming forum. Nah, never got finished.'



» Matthew conclusively answers the 'Cake or Death' question posed on the **Retro Gamer** forum.





» Some screenshots of one of Matt's unfinished platformers, *Oh Diana!*.

All these loose ends. I press him further on his most famous lost game, '*Miner Willy Meets The Taxman*', a ten-level horizontal-scrolling platformer for the Speccy, not to be confused with the Commodore 64's *Megatree*.

'You'd start in modern times and then go back through various periods of English history. A Tudor level, a medieval one, something with the Celtic tribes in, back to the Romans, who were the first taxmen.' He taps the side of his head. 'It's still all up here.'

Mum's back from bingo, having bagged £100. We're all toasting her success with the last of the Guinness quickly followed by a fresh bottle of red. The mood is upbeat, until mum puts down her glass.

'You know, it is bad that Matthew now has nothing. You'd think somewhere, in all these websites and talk about him, he should have some money.'

There's an awkward silence. I try to fill it by rambling on about how many people out there still care about Matthew, want to know he's okay, wonder what he's going to do next. Matt mumbles, 'Yeah,' and they both smile.

'Who'd have thought that 20 years after they'd be all this interest in those early computer games,' mum says. 'I suppose for them it's history. For us it's just a few days ago.'

It goes quiet again. 'Coffee anyone?' she asks.

The next morning, Matt shows me the photographs that mum has carefully kept alongside various press cuttings of Matthew from the Eighties. There's one of him as a baby splashing in a sink, another of him with his first bike and some magazine shots of him at his workstation during the development of *Jet Set Willy*. He passes me one of himself at seven, in pyjamas, staring wide-eyed into the distance. Behind him are swirling patterns, like giant rainbow fish or peacock feathers perhaps.

'Yeah, my dad painted my bedroom wall with all these colours. Psychedelic,' he smiles, with the same twinkle in his eyes.

Before I leave, he gives me a little souvenir. It's a sketch his sister Michelle did of Matt, sprawled on a sofa, surrounded by overturned cans of lager, half-eaten tins of beans, computer manuals, crumpled fag packets, a half empty bottle of British sherry and some little scribbles of ladders and platforms.

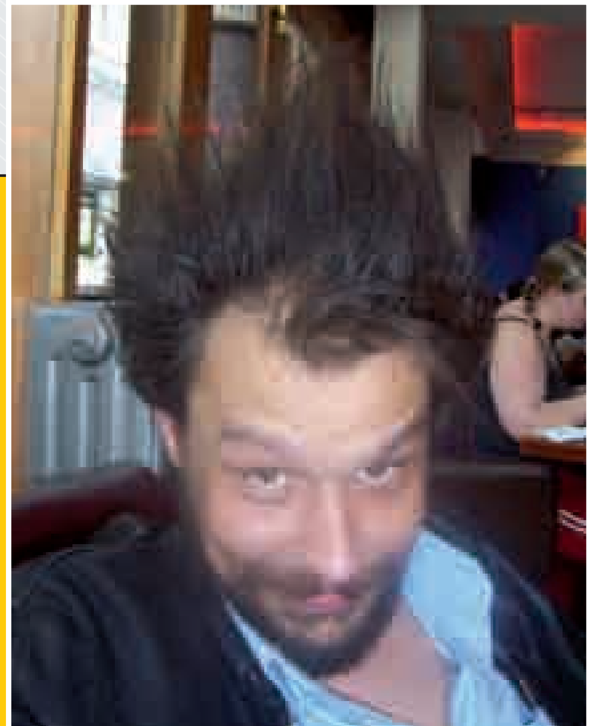
'She was at art college when I was coding *Manic Miner*. Yeah, I imagine that's how she found me some afternoons.'

I say I'll get it framed and call it '*After Tracey Emin's Bed*'. He laughs and then suddenly notices the picture includes the family cat sitting on top of the settee.

'Now does that cat look like it has a bladder big enough to soak four inches deep of paper right through?'

"I WAS WORKING OUT HOW TO MAKE GAMES BEFORE I HAD A COMPUTER, SCRIBBLING ON GRAPH PAPER AT THE BACK OF THE CLASS"

MATTHEW SMITH



» As our Desert Island Disks castaway in 2004, which appeared in **RG**'s first anthology.

READERS QUESTIONS...

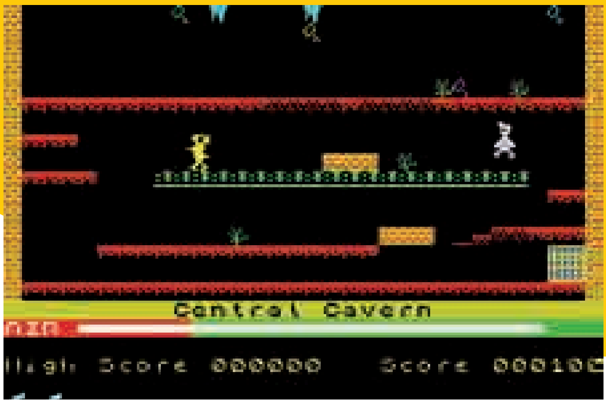
Captain Scarlet: How did your type-in listing *Andre's Night Off* come about and why did you code it in BASIC?
Matthew Smith: *Computer & Video Games* asked for something and most people can't type in machine code, as it's just a huge string of numbers… the magazine asked me when I was down there plugging. I had to go down to London to plug for *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*. Nah, not much plugging for *Styx*. They asked me over dinner. That's the only time I've ever had frog's legs. Is that why it had a chef in it? Nah, I just gave one of the sprites from *Jet Set Willy* a name. I think I must have been developing a minor character.

MC1: Whose idea was it to include the boot cheat in *Manic Miner*?
MS: Oh yeah, I put that in. I needed it myself to test it. I had the cheat in from the start, with the mechanism to turn it on. When it came time to get rid of it for the finished thing, I thought hang on, some people might like this, so I put a code in to get it. Yeah, it was originally my driving licence number, with an error in and twisted round a bit.

SirClive: Miner Willy for Xbox Live Arcade?
MS: It could happen, but I'm really resistant to the XNA thing… I'm cynical about Microsoft's motives. The whole dot net thing. It's been sold as an opening up of the whole Java ideal, write once, run anywhere thing, but I think it's plainly a way to shut out non-approved sections of the market. Write a game in C or C++ with Open GL, you can publish for Apple Computers, PS2… I suppose you could always get a C++ dot net compiler. But what's really stopping me are the shenanigans of Tommy Barton. I know if I did *Manic Miner* for Xbox Live, he would pop up wanting a slice. So I could do it, or I could do a different game in my style.

Reech: What disappoints you most about modern videogames?
MS: Price! Ultimately that's the reason I haven't got more. Bloody 30 quid a go! That's the single most pressing reason.

Sureshot: Pirates or Ninjas?
MS: Definitely pirates.



» The platforming brilliance that is *Manic Miner*. Matthew Smith, we salute you.

Merman: Have you still got the original paper maps of the *Manic Miner* levels you designed on holiday?
MS: I did till about 13 years ago. Before I went to Holland, I'd moved into a shared house. I put all my old stuff in the attic [This includes the maps, the hard drive with the lost *JSW* levels on and his original metallic green Spectrum]. My mates lived there and I said I'd be back in six months, but I wasn't. And six months would have been too long anyway. They would have lunched it out by then, as the expression goes. So it's more than likely been cleared out. But you never know.

Uglifruit: Did you design the loading screen for *Manic Miner*? Animated my arse, that's flashing that is…
MS: [laughs] Yeah, I know what he's talking about. Yeah, that's me…

Markopoloman: If you booted up *Manic Miner* right now, could you complete it without cheating?
MS: Not with three lives, no!

CoolPants: Was *Miner 2049er* a big influence on *Manic Miner*?
MS: Very much an influence. I'd say it was my version, or a Spectrum version, of *Miner 2049er*. The computer determines the rules of physics like the curve you can jump… Hang on, let's see what Bill Hogue's up to now… [Matt searches for Bill's Big Five Software site] There you go! These were the best games on the Tandy. And his *Galaxian* was best of all. Really good, that was. And *Robot Attack*, that actually had speech coming out of the cassette port [adopts metallic voice] ROBOT ATTACK! Yeah, he was a big influence. And his code as well. I disassembled his code to shreds. Not *Miner 2049er*, his earlier stuff on the Tandy. I learned a lot from pulling his stuff apart.

The Master: Who is your favourite Dr Who?
MS: Jon Pertwee.

Yakmag: If you could do things differently in your past, would you change anything and if so, what?
MS: Regrets? Too few to mention. Don't fancy facing that final curtain. No, I think I've done my best at everything. And I've been lucky.'

Special thanks to Matthew and his mum for their wonderful hospitality and to Chris Evans and Richard Burton for their help with this article. All photographs © M. Smith & P. Drury

For your chance to quiz future castaways please visit the **Retro Gamer** forums at www.retrogamer.net/forum



POGOSTICK OLYMPICS

TO POGOLY GO WHERE NO GAME HAD GONE BEFORE



- **PUBLISHER:** SILVERBIRD
- **RELEASED:** 1998
- **GENRE:** RACING
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** CPC
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

The poor old pogo stick is a device that's about as practical as it is useful for circling the globe. It requires a ridiculous amount of manual labour to actually get one to travel more than a few yards and they're also innately unstable sticks that need an almost unattainable amount of physical and mental rigour to keep upright.

The advantage that our beloved computer games bring us, though, is that they do away with the palaver and pain that real life so very often brings. There's no wackier illustration of this notion than Silverbird's *Pogostick Olympics*, a game that I will happily admit to loving quite a bit as a young person. Why? Who the hell knows? It had chunky colourful graphics for one, a brilliantly chirpy tune and it was an utter doozey to complete. The only way you can die in this game is to use up three lives by scoring zero points. Now, to put that into perspective, perhaps the only way to mistakenly achieve that is to load the game into your Amstrad, start the game up and simply drop down dead.

Nowadays, I can paint a very different picture of this game, owing to this mature dependency to actually try to get a handle on the peculiar ethos of videogames. Here is a game split into four events: popping balloons using a helmet with a spike on it; hopping over hurdles that are so closely knitted together it's impossible not to finish the race without covering your keyboard in sweat; a triple jump with stupid speed-reducing ferns strewn all over the track; and an event where you have to pop trundling white balls by shooting dubious-looking white stuff from your groin. The day's events culminate in an obstacle course that adopts the idea of having different surfaces affect the speed of your character mercilessly outlawed. Although, it did have chunky graphics and a chirpy tune… that much, at least, appears to have remained.


OLYMPICS
POPPING
TOTA
0000

RETROINSPECTION

SPECTRUM 128

"THE MARKET WANTED MORE MEMORY AND BETTER SOUND IN ORDER TO HELP PRODUCE MORE ENGAGING GAMES, AND THAT WAS DONE IN THE MOST MECHANICAL WAY POSSIBLE"

RUPERT GOODWINS, SINCLAIR RESEARCH





Year released: September 1985 (Spain), February 1986 (UK)

Buy it now for: £50 (£179 at launch)

Specifications: Processor: Zilog Z80A CPU; Speed: 3.54MHz; RAM: 128K; ROM: 32K; Display: 256x192 pixels, 32x24 characters; Colours: 15 in total (eight basic plus seven 'bright' colours); Sound: AY-3-8912 chip outputting three channel sound

Why the Spectrum 128 was great… It was the machine that the Spectrum Plus should have been. Extra memory allowed for bigger and better games, and the AY chip made everything sound sweeter. It also holds the distinction of being the last 'proper' Speccy before Amstrad muscled in.

THE ZX80, ZX81 AND ZX SPECTRUM FOLLOWED IN QUICK SUCCESSION, BUT SINCLAIR BUMBLED AND STUMBLED WHEN IT CAME TO EXTENDING THE ZX LINE, EVENTUALLY RELEASING THE SPECTRUM 128 IN 1985 AMID FEARS THAT THE COMPANY WAS FACING FINANCIAL RUIN. MARTYN CARROLL LOOKS BACK AT THE COMPUTER THAT NEARLY NEVER HAPPENED

Back in the mid-Eighties, alliteration-loving journos used the term Super Spectrum to describe every new computer that Sinclair Research was rumoured to be working on. First to receive the honour was the LC-3 (Low Cost Colour Computer), but this was more of a colour ZX81 than anything else. Then there was Pandora, a portable Spectrum with a flat-screen monitor, and Loki, a Z80-based computer that would go toe to toe with the ST and Amiga. There was also a project predating Loki that was being developed with the codename 'Super Spectrum'. Sadly, none of these computers made the perilous leap from development to production and very few firm details exist.

"Sinclair was a rather secretive place," says Rupert Goodwins, who worked at the company as a programmer and helped develop the Spectrum 128's system software. "There were always projects on the go or in suspended animation, and ideas from abandoned projects often got revived in some form. Most of this stuff, if it existed at all, only got as far as breadboard prototypes. The decision to develop it properly, which would have meant serious money on integrated circuit design and system software, was never taken."

Money was not something Sinclair had a great deal of at the time. The QL, Sir Clive's great obelisk of hope, failed to wow the business machine market when launched in early 1984. It was an expensive failure and one that would have an impact on all future projects. Even so, punters and the press were surprised when, after all the speculation involving secretive new products, Sinclair could only muster up the Spectrum Plus. The Plus was just a standard Spectrum stuffed into a new case with a moving QL-style keyboard replacing the old rubber membrane. The hardware was unchanged, making it more Spectrum 1.1 then 2.0. The upgrade wasn't even launched as such – it just crept on to disgruntled retailers' shelves in October 1984.

This play-it-safe approach had nothing to do with the QL shambles, however. In fact, the focus shifted back to the Spectrum *because* the QL failed. "Clive always felt that games computers were a bit beneath the dignity of the company," reveals Rupert. "The Spectrum was seen as yesterday's computer and he wanted to stride ahead with wafer-scale integration, business machines and AI. There was a lot of snobbery involved. But when the QL misfired, more attention was paid to working out what had been a success and seeing how it could be best developed. Bright, shiny, noisy and cheap suddenly became desirable attributes."

"But then we hit other problems with Sinclair – a near-inability to get products out, lots of infighting and, in the latter days, all the money going away. I mean, we couldn't even get any memory expansion packs or disk interfaces out of the door – stuff that one-man bands were pushing out of sheds all the way from Penzance to Prestonpans."

For a while, it looked like a proper Spectrum successor might never happen, but then the solution – to the lack of money problem, at least – arrived from overseas. The Spectrum was performing really well in Spain, where it was distributed by Madrid-based firm Investronica. Charles Cotton, Sinclair's sales and marketing director, claimed that the machine accounted for more than half of all home computers sold in the territory at the time. While the Spanish market was smaller and less developed than the UK's, the results were good enough to convince Investronica to invest in the development of a new machine. With fresh impetus and much-needed funds in place, Sinclair and Investronica worked to develop an upgrade that exploited the Spectrum's popularity as a gaming machine.

"The market wanted more memory and better sound in order to help produce more engaging games," says Rupert. "And that was done in the most mechanical way possible… take a standard sound chip, gate in some more RAM, futz around with the system software and get it out as soon as possible." The result of all this futzing around was the Spectrum 128.

The 128 may have been a quick and dirty upgrade but it did address most of the Spectrum's shortcomings. Perhaps the biggest criticism levelled at the original machine was its weedy sound capabilities. Rather than a dedicated sound chip, the Spectrum featured a small CPU-controlled speaker capable of playing a single note at a time. It was known as the 'beeper' because that's effectively what it did. For the 128, Sinclair replaced the beeper with the three-channel AY-3-8912 chip. Unlike the beeper, sound could be channelled through a TV without additional hardware, so you could finally pump up the volume, and sound output no longer impacted on the CPU, allowing for proper in-game music.

Next on the additions list was more memory. When the Spectrum launched in 1982, 48K was seen as a generous amount, but as we now know, you can never ever have enough RAM. When it came to the amount of extra memory, 128K was a given really as Commodore, Amstrad and Atari had already released 128K versions of their 8-bit machines.

The third main addition was 128 BASIC. The updated version introduced a number of new commands (to control the AY chip, for example), but the most obvious change was the overdue retirement of the one-touch keyword entry system. This idiosyncratic input method, where whole commands were entered by pressing one or more keys, was ditched in favour of a standard entry system where you typed out each command in full. An improved full-screen edit function was also added, enabling users to easily amend BASIC listings using the cursor keys.

Updating BASIC proved to be a rather big headache for all those involved. It was absolutely vital that the Spectrum 128 would run the huge library of existing Spectrum software, so the team had to ensure that it was fully compatible with the 48K ROM. They eventually did this by including the complete 48K ROM and allowing the user to switch from 128 to 48 mode on start-up, thereby circumventing the new 128 features that might cause compatibility problems with older software. This workable solution was complicated by the fact that the original BASIC source was broken. "The biggest shock I had when I started work was that the Spectrum source code within Sinclair was in an unusable state,"

INSTANT EXPERT

The 128 was codenamed 'Derby' during development.

The CPU in the 128 runs slightly faster than in the original 48K machine – 3.54MHz as opposed to 3.5MHz.

The extended 128K memory doubles as a RAM disk, allowing for rapid data access.

The AY-3-8912 sound chip had already been used in the Amstrad CPC, Oric-1 and Atari ST, making it a sensible off-the-shelf choice for the 128.

The Spanish 128 didn't show a system menu on start-up – users had to type 'spectrum' at the BASIC prompt to enter 48K mode – but it did feature a built-in text editor that was dropped from the UK release.

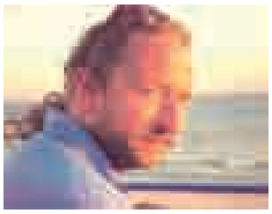
Despite claims that the 128 would support all existing Spectrum software, some games would not run, even in 48K mode, due to subtle changes made to the 48K ROM. *Elite* was one high-profile title that was incompatible with the 128.

Fans affectionately refer to the 128 as the 'toast rack' due to the distinctive heat sink bolted to the right side of the machine.

With the 128, Sinclair reluctantly targeted the gaming market. At the UK launch, chief executive Bill Jeffrey said, "We have focused the 128 on the entertainment sector. Recent market research has shown us that entertainment is easily the most common use of computers in the home."

The 128 was compatible with first-party add-ons including the Interface 1, Interface 2 and the ZX Printer.

Ben Cheese, who designed the 128's hardware, used to play saxophone with Eighties Brit funksters Shakatak.



» Rick Dickinson, the award-winning designer of every Sinclair computer going right back to the ZX80.



» Rupert Goodwins, currently technology editor at ZDNet UK, joined Sinclair in early 1985 and helped convert the 48K ROM to the Spectrum 128. However, he's most proud of coding the little Spectrum stripes on the on-screen menus.

SPECTRUM 128



» If it wasn't for Investronica's involvement, it's very likely that the 128 would never have been made.



» With the 128, Sinclair swallowed its pride and finally accepted that the Spectrum was a gaming machine.

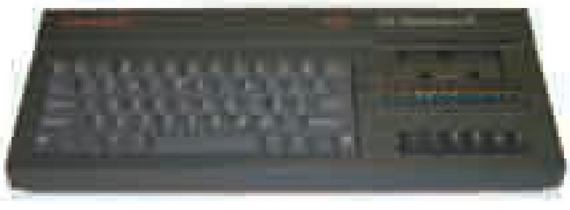


» In Spain it came with a numeric keypad. It's believed that the keypad was never officially released in the UK.

OTHER VERSIONS WHEN ONE MACHINE ISN'T ENOUGH

THE +2 AND +3

Having swallowed up Sinclair Research in 1986, Amstrad spat out a couple of new computers based around the 128 hardware. The +2 was the Spectrum equivalent of a CPC464 with an integrated tape drive, while the +3 added a built-in three-inch floppy drive just like the CPC664. Both machines benefited from a decent keyboard and twin joystick ports. The +2 was later replaced by the +2A, a cost-reduced model that Amstrad continued to manufacture until the early Nineties.



» The Spectrum +2. We can't tell you what Rick Dickinson said about this Amstrad-designed machine for fear of upsetting younger readers.

says Rupert. "So we – or mostly me, if I remember correctly – had to practically retype it all in from Melbourne House's Complete Spectrum ROM Disassembly."

Much less time was spent on the 128's external appearance. To minimise costs and speed up production, the casing and keyboard was handed down wholesale from the Plus. Rick Dickinson, who designed all of Sinclair's computers, admits that the 128 didn't

making. In the earlier days the decisions were pretty much down to Clive, and then the company grew and there were marketing managers and stock managers and all the rest of it, and the decision making was done from a different perspective."

In this new corporate climate, Rick did at least manage to make his mark in one very noticeable way. Unlike the Plus, the 128 had a whacking great external heat sink running down its right-hand side. Due to the extra components that required power, the 128 generated more heat than the Plus, so Rick took the unusual step of adding cooling fins to the outside of the casing. "The 128 got very hot, and the main heat source was a single component, which was the voltage regulator, so I made a decision to move the voltage regulator off to one side and attach it directly to a heat sink, which was then bolted to the outside of the case. The heat sink was die cast in zinc, which conducts heat well enough, especially when you make it as big as I did! It certainly made it distinctive."

"THERE WAS NOTHING PARTICULARLY UNIQUE ABOUT THE 128. IT WAS A QUICK JOB, BUT IT WAS A GOOD PRODUCT. GOOD AND RIGHT FOR THE TIME" RICK DICKINSON, SINCLAIR RESEARCH

require much effort on his part, and it certainly didn't sit well with his somewhat romantic notions of product design and innovation. "From my standpoint it was churn it out and get on with it," he tells us. "The sad thing is that we never designed a second-generation Spectrum where you could see a very clear migration from the original. With the Plus and 128 there was no similarity whatsoever with the Spectrum. They were just like the QL, which became our corporate style, and that was all down to the changes in the decision

The 128 also received a couple of additional ports: video RGB-out for connecting the computer directly to a monitor, and RS232/MIDI-out for connecting various peripherals. An obvious omission was any kind of joystick interface, which was surprising seeing as the 128 was designed with gaming in mind.

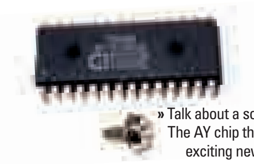
Built-in joystick ports would have been welcome, but surely the most desirable addition on any fan's wish list would have been an end to attribute clash. Due to shortcomings in the Spectrum's display capabilities, only two colours could appear in any 8x8 pixel square, so colours would bleed all over the place. Programmers learnt to stem the flow as best they could, and Speccy owners grew used to the sight of it, but it was surely something that should have been fixed in the 128, even if it meant sacrificing resolution.

The 128 was launched in Spain in September 1985, with it making a belated appearance in the UK in February 1986. The delay was mainly due to an existing deal with Dixons. The high-street chain had paid £10m to secure a huge number of Plus machines and understandably didn't want Sinclair to release a shiny new model prior to the profitable Christmas period.

As the UK launch approached, computer journalists took a closer look at the 128 and the feedback was generally favourable. In *Your Spectrum*, Max Phillips wondered how much people would be



» Sir Clive of Cambridge, undoubtedly the number one hero of the British people… ever!



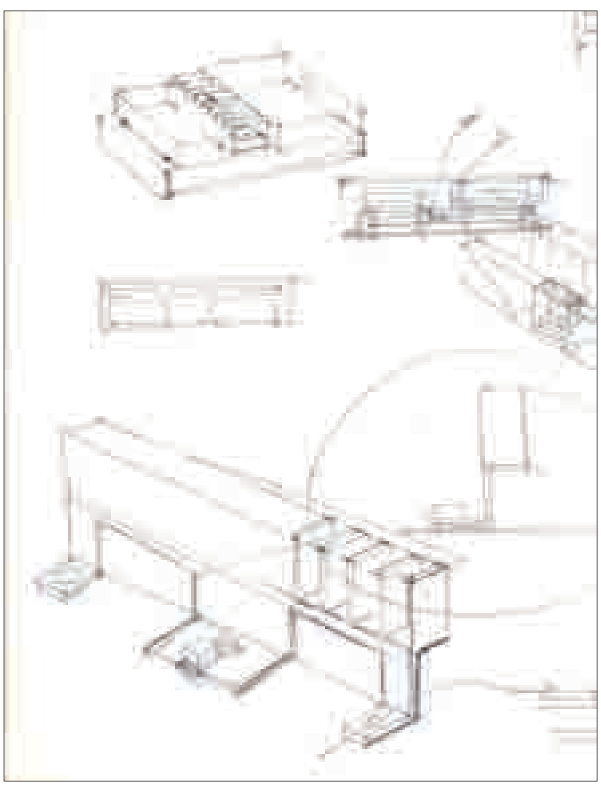
» Talk about a song and dance… The AY chip that generated the exciting new Speccy sound.

FULL SPEC SPECCY

When it came to developing the 128, it's a shame Sinclair didn't take a closer look at what Timex had done with the TS2068, the official Spectrum upgrade released in the US in late 1983. The TS2068 was essentially a 48K Spectrum with some neat extras designed to appeal to the American market. It boasted an AY chip (the same one that ended up in the 128), a ROM cartridge slot, twin joystick ports and additional video modes allowing for higher screen and colour resolutions. However, changes to the way the ROM was organised meant that the TS2068 wasn't compatible with more than 90 per cent of commercial Spectrum software. Maybe if the 128 had spent more time on the drawing board, Sinclair could've worked out a way of incorporating the TS2068's advanced features (particularly the extra video modes), while ensuring that compatibility with existing Spectrum software wasn't affected.



» In many ways the TS2068 was a more progressive machine that the Spectrum 128.



» One of Rick Dickinson's early production sketches, showing where the 128's heat sink would be positioned.



» The 128 system menu. According to Rupert Goodwins, on the 128 development machines the copyright message at the bottom read, "Hip hep snap the boogie". So now you know…

COMMUNITY THE BEST SPECTRUM WEBSITES

World of Spectrum

www.worldofspectrum.org

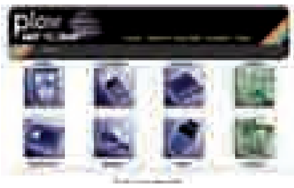
This site really doesn't need any introduction, so we're not even going to bother. If you haven't visited World of Spectrum before then go there straight away. Do not pass go, do not collect £200 and so on. With information on just about every single piece of Spectrum software that has ever been released, it's quite possibly the finest retro resource on the internet.



Planet Sinclair

www.nvg.ntnu.no/sinclair/

If you're really interested in Sinclair hardware then this site is definitely the right site for you and well worth delving into. The complete range of ZX computers is covered here, of course, and there is also tons and tons of information about Sinclair's other gadgets and gizmos, from the company's earliest radio right up until the infamous C5 electric buggy thingy.



Jonathan Cauldwell

http://members.fortunecity.com/jonathan6/egghead/

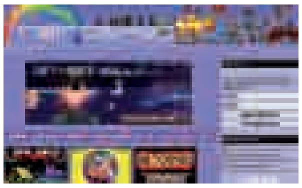
Homebrew hero Jonathan Cauldwell's website is always worth a visit because you never quite know exactly what you might find. There's likely to be news about his latest projects, possibly a bit of code to play around with and, if you're lucky, maybe even a full game to download for free (like the latest *Egghead* game).



Retrospec

http://retrospec.sgn.net

If retro game remakes make you grin from ear to ear then you have to stop by Retrospec and sample some of the best 8-bit updates available on the internet. Speccy fanatics are advised to seek out the brilliant remakes of *Atic Atac*, *Head Over Heels*, *Manic Miner*, *Halls Of The Things* and *Zub*. There are tons more remakes too, and all of them are really worth downloading.



prepared to pay for the new machine. "The price is crucial," he wrote. "At around £120 it's a goer, but if Sinclair does the dastardly and comes in at £160 then there will be fewer takers." The 128 launched in the UK at a double-dastardly £179.

Still, at the UK launch event, Sir Clive boasted that interest in the machine was unprecedented with orders worth £8m already secured. And of course there were all those full-fat double cream 128K games to lap up… "Software quite unlike anything seen before," claimed Sir Clive. It was deeply ironic then that the launch titles turned out to be *exactly* what we'd seen before, because they were all updated versions of existing 48K games with a few added extras, such as additional content or new AY music. Even the two Ocean games bundled with the 128 – *Daley Thompson's Super-Test* and *The Neverending Story* – were tarted-up 48K titles.

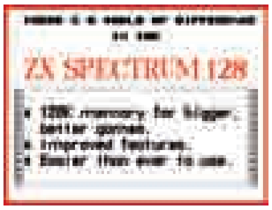
It seemed that publishers were unwilling to exclude the huge 48K user base by releasing 128K-only software, although as the 128 market grew it became the norm for new games to cater for both 48K and 128K owners.

Perhaps the 128's biggest claim to fame is that it enjoyed the shortest shelf life of any Sinclair computer. In April 1986, following months of speculation about Sinclair's financial woes, Amstrad acquired Sinclair Research from Sir Clive in a deal worth £5m. Amstrad moved quickly to align the Spectrum with its CPC range and in September it ushered in the +2, leaving the axe to fall on the 128 after just six months on sale.

Looking back, Rupert views the 128 as a missed opportunity. "The general feeling within Sinclair was that we needed something new and wonderful to get back into the swing of things, and the 128 wasn't that interesting," he says. "If we'd have been serious about it we would have put in a floppy interface, more video modes, and cost reduced it a lot more. It suffered from a lack of imagination."

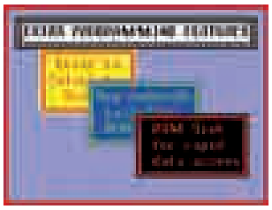
"There was nothing very unique about the 128," agrees Rick. "It was a quick job, but it was a good product and right for the time."

It was the right product for Amstrad, who placed the 128's hardware and system software at the core of both its +2 and +3 machines. Ultimately, it may not have been the elusive Super Spectrum, but development of the 128 was key in breathing new life into the Speccy and prolonging its commercial life into the Nineties.

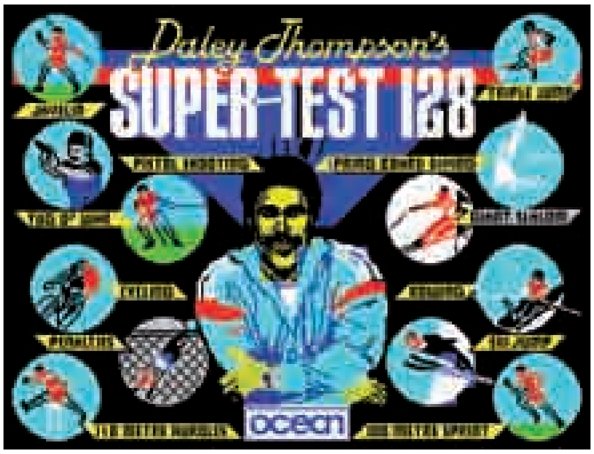


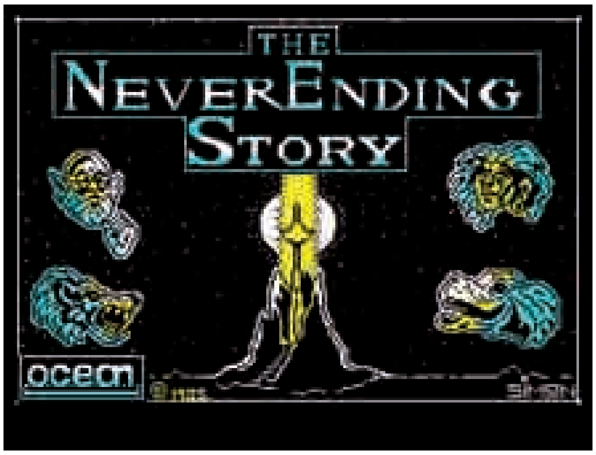






» Sinclair produced a demo for retailers to play in their shops. It showcased the 128's capabilities and some of it was even true.





» Two Ocean games were given away with the 128 – frantic joystick-wrecker *Daley Thompson's Super-Test* and languid text adventure *The Neverending Story*.

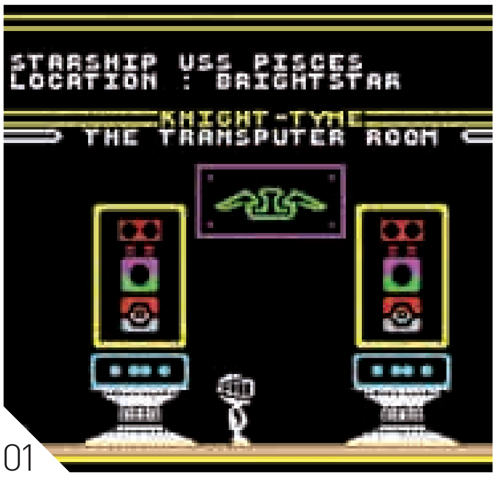


» The ultimate accessory for any Spectrum 128 owner – Romantic Robot's Multiface 128, a wondrous box of tricks.

SPECTRUM 128

PERFECT TEN GAMES

Pure and simple – ten games that showcased the Spectrum 128's capabilities. For argument's sake, the titles that very nearly made the top ten are Fairlight 2 (The Edge), The Pawn (Magnetic Scrolls), Chase HQ (Ocean), Pang (Ocean), Little Computer People (Activision), HeroQuest (Gremlin) and Thundercats (Elite)



01

KNIGHT TYME

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MASTERTRONIC
» **CREATED BY:** DAVID JONES
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FINDERS KEEPERS

01 If you'd just blown the best part of £200 on a 128 then it must have been soothing to see *Knight Tyme* available for just three English pounds. That's right, the first game to be developed specially for the 128 (rather than a lukewarm 48K update) was a Mastertronic budget title that showed full-price publishers how it should be done. Following directly on from *Spellbound*, the third entry in the *Magic Knight* series shifted the action forward in time to a faraway galaxy filled with weird and wonderful characters and head-flexing puzzles. It was witty and clever and, in all honesty, grossly underpriced. A great in-game tune sealed the deal.

AMAUROTE

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MASTERTRONIC
» **CREATED BY:** BINARY DESIGN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ZUB

02 Along with the *Magic Knight* games, *Amaurote* was another budget title that was better than many full-price releases. Playing like an updated version of *Ant Attack*, you were dropped into a city swarming with oversized insects. But rather than running in the opposite direction, your job was to locate and destroy the insect queen and her workers in all 25 sectors. The presentation on the 128K version was superb, with a quirky in-game tune by David Whittaker and a animated 'drop' sequence playing as you move into each sector. Along with *Zub*, *180* and *Feud*, it was another slice of budget brilliance from the super Pickford Bros.


02

STARGLIDER

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** RAINBIRD
» **CREATED BY:** REALTIME GAMES
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CARRIER COMMAND

03 Vector graphics games always fared well on the Spectrum so there were high hopes for its version of Jez San's 16-bit classic. Realtime Games handled the coding and the end result surpassed all expectations. The 48K version was great, although there was little to do beyond racking up a high score and progressing to the next level. The enhanced 128K version was the complete package with a number of special missions and touches like in-game speech, a rear-view scanner, and slo-mo replays when you destroy Starglider One. If only other publishers had lavished as much attention on their 128K games.

RENEGADE

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** IMAGINE SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** MIKE LAMB
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ROBOCOP

04 Was there a better version of this arcade game on any home computer? Doubtful, as *Renegade* on the Speccy was arguably better than the coin-op. It was more fun on the 128, as it featured a number of elements that had to be cut from the 48K version. There was music throughout (a different tune for each level) and an extra area to brawl in before the final encounter with the boss. More subtle was the useful shoulder-throw move that was unique to the 128 version. The sequel, *Target Renegade*, was also superb, although from a 128 perspective it didn't add any additional content beyond AY music.

TAI PAN

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** SENTIENT SOFTWARE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** WEC LE MANS

05 In the Eighties, Ocean liked to exploit pretty much everything and the 128 was no exception. It was responsible for the two titles bundled with the machine and was quick to create 128K versions of all its new games. Later on it was also the first major publisher to drop support for the 48K altogether. *Tai Pan* was the first game it developed from the ground up for the 128 (a 48K version was also available but it was a stripped down multi-load affair). Based on the book by James Clavell, this heady mix of arcade, adventure and strategy elements upon China's high seas was the first 128K mega game.


03



04



05





06



07



08

WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
- » **CREATED BY:** DENTON DESIGN
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE GREAT ESCAPE

06 This was what 128 owners had been waiting for – a sprawling arcade adventure that was too big to cram into 48K. Inspired by Seventies movie *The Land That Time Forgot*, it time-warped you to a hostile world where everything wanted to eat you and your party. There were obstacles to overcome and puzzles to solve, but the emphasis was on exploring. Some set pieces, such as the swamp crossing, must rank among the Speccy's finest moments. With *WTSS*, Denton Designs built on the foundations laid in *The Great Escape* and created a gripping adventure.

CARRIER COMMAND

- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** RAINBIRD
- » **CREATED BY:** REALTIME GAMES
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BATTLE COMMAND

07 With *Starglider*, Realtime showed it could take a complex 16-bit game and port it to the Speccy, particularly when there was 128K to play with. It delivered the goods again with this brilliant conversion that re-created the multi-faceted gameplay of the original. The graphics engine was particularly impressive, especially when you consider that the C64 version dropped the 3D viewpoint completely, in favour of a top-down 2D approach. This conversion spent two years in the making but it was well worth the wait. The sequel, *Battle Command*, is also recommended.

MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE

- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
- » **CREATED BY:** SPECIAL FX
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CABAL

08 Colour clash was the bane of every Spectrum programmer, and in later years many sidestepped the problem by opting for a dull monochrome display. Thank God then for games like *Midnight Resistance*. Special effects went mad, splashing Speccy colour all over the place. This glorious graphical style really suited the run-'n'-gun format. The game would run on the 48K, but the only way to play it was on a 128 with all nine levels loading in one go and the excellent AY soundtrack complementing the on-screen carnage. The only thing missing was co-op play.



09

PRICE OF MAGIK

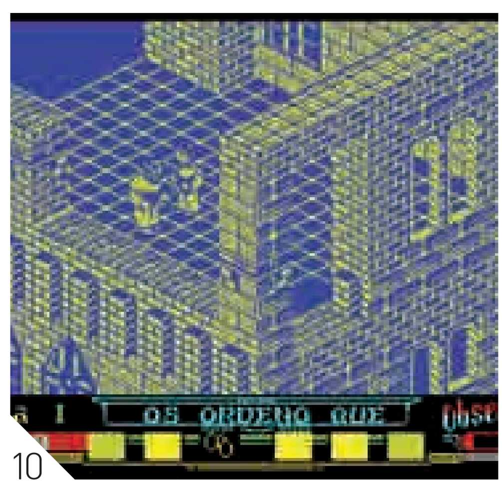
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** LEVEL 9
- » **CREATED BY:** LEVEL 9
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE WORM IN PARADISE

09 Having spent a number of years cramming text adventures into the Spectrum's 48K RAM, Level 9 made the jump to the bigger memory Speccy without any hesitation. *Price Of Magik* – the third and final part of the *Time And Magik* trilogy – was the first to offer an enhanced 128K version. It featured the same location graphics as the 48K version, but the text descriptions were longer and loaded with extra detail, making for a much more involving adventure. Overall, *Price Of Magik* was one of the best games to come from developer Level 9, with a cracking Lovecraft-inspired storyline, tough but fair puzzles, non-linear progression and an intelligent parser. For us it just pipped *The Pawn*.

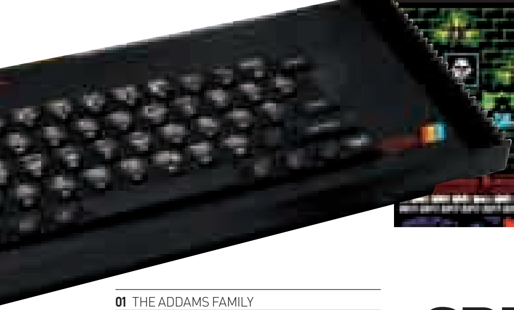
LA ABADIA DEL CRIMEN

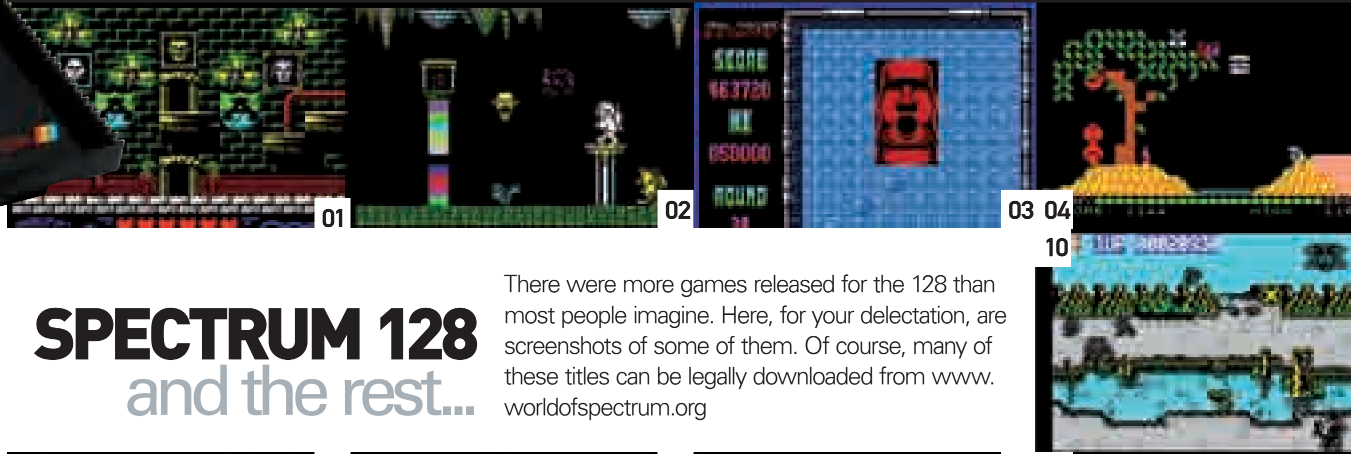
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OPERA SOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** PACO MENENDEZ
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SIR FRED

10 The Spectrum was popular in many European countries, particularly Spain, where home-grown software was developed to supplement titles exported from the UK. Opera Soft was one of the most successful Spanish developers and this classy 128K-only title helped cement its reputation at home and abroad. *La Abadia Del Crimen* (*The Abbey Of Crime*) was unofficially based on Umberto Eco's novel *The Name Of The Rose*, and put you in control of a Franciscan monk trying to solve a series of murders in a brilliantly depicted monastery. The game was not released outside its home country so the text is in Spanish, but don't let that put you off. This really is a game to discover.



10

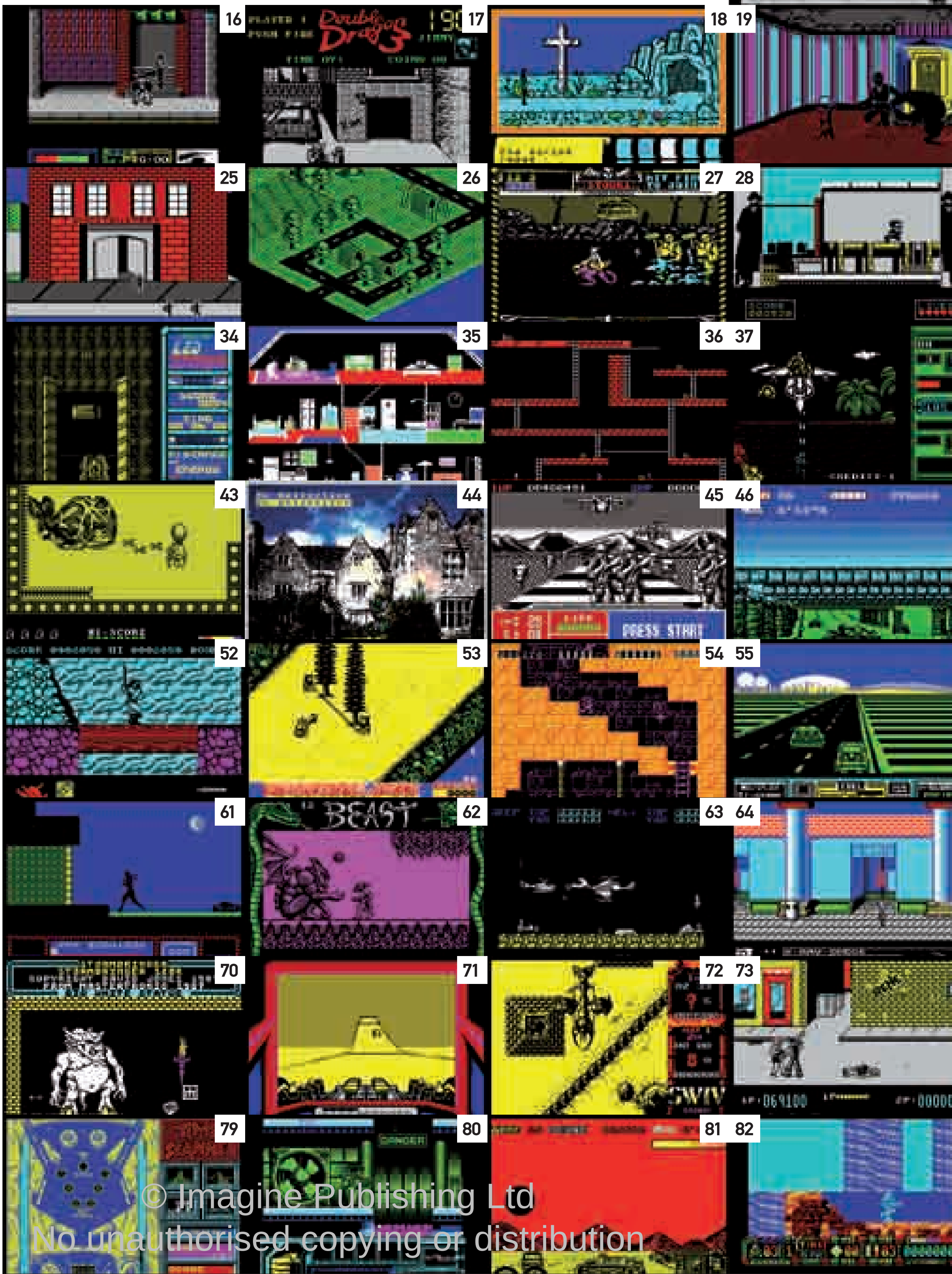


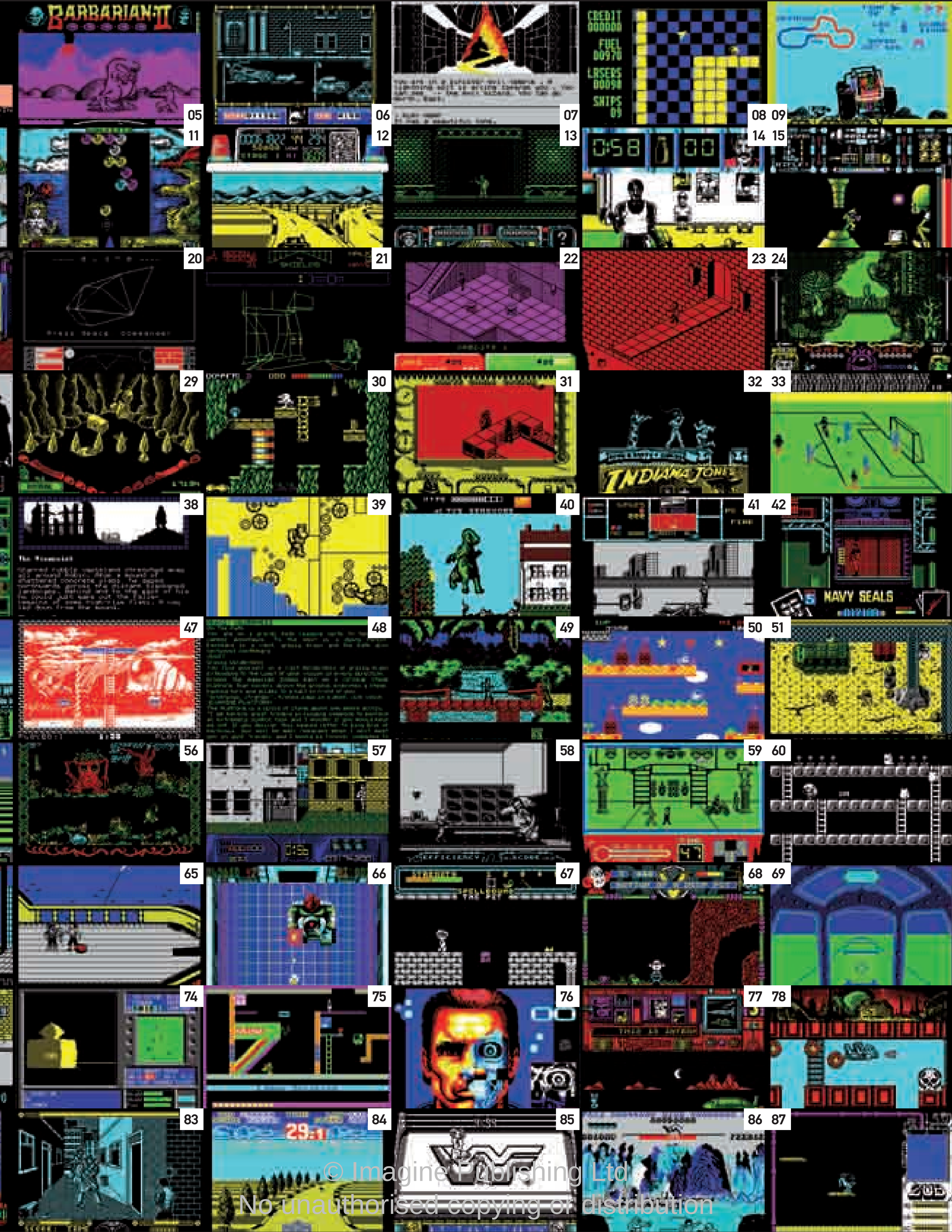


SPECTRUM 128 and the rest...

There were more games released for the 128 than most people imagine. Here, for your delectation, are screenshots of some of them. Of course, many of these titles can be legally downloaded from www.worldofspectrum.org

01 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
02 THE ARC OF YESOD
03 ARKANOID 2
04 AUF WIEDERSEHEN MONTY
05 BARBARIAN II
06 BATMAN THE MOVIE
07 BLIZZARD PASS
08 BLIZZARD'S RIFT
09 BUGGY BOY
10 CABAL
11 CANNON BUBBLE
12 CHASE HQ
13 DALEK ATTACK
14 DALEY THOMPSON'S OLYMPIC CHALLENGE
15 DAN DARE III
16 DARKMAN
17 DOUBLE DRAGON 3
18 DRAGONIA
19 DRAGON'S LAIR 2
20 ELITE
21 THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
22 ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
23 FAIRLIGHT
24 GAUNTLET III
25 GHOSTBUSTERS
26 GLIDER RIDER
27 GOLDEN AXE
28 HUDSON HAWK
29 HYDROFOOL
30 IMPOSSAMOLE
31 INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
32 INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE
33 INTERNATIONAL MATCH DAY
34 LED STORM
35 LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE
36 LODE RUNNER
37 MERCS
38 MINDFIGHTER
39 MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS
40 THE MUNCHER
41 NARC
42 NAVY SEALS
43 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
44 ON REFLECTION
45 OPERATION THUNDERBOLT
46 OUTRUN
47 PANG
48 THE PAWN
49 PLATOON
50 RAINBOW ISLANDS
51 RAMBO III
52 RASTAN
53 RETURN OF THE JEDI
54 RICK DANGEROUS
55 ROAD BLASTERS
56 ROBIN OF THE WOOD
57 ROBOCOP 2
58 ROBOCOP 3
59 ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW
60 ROD-LAND
61 SABOTEUR 2
62 SHADOW OF THE BEAST
63 SILKWORM
64 THE SIMPSONS
65 SKULL & CROSSBONES
66 SMASH TV
67 SPELLBOUND
68 SPELLBOUND DIZZY
69 SPITFIRE 40
70 STORMBRINGER
71 STUNT CAR RACER
72 SWIV
73 TARGET RENEGADE
74 TAU CETI – THE SPECIAL EDITION
75 TECHNICIAN TED: THE MEGAMIX
76 TERMINATOR 2
77 THUNDERBIRDS
78 THUNDERCATS
79 TIME SCANNER
80 TOTAL RECALL
81 TURBO OUTRUN
82 TURRICAN II
83 THE UNTOUCHABLES
84 WEC LE MANS
85 WWF WRESTLEMANIA
86 YIE AR KUNG-FU
87 ZUB




BARBARIAN II
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FUEL 00970
LASERS 00098
SHIPS 09
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INDIANA JONES
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NAVY SEALS
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THE HISTORY OF COMMAND & CONQUER

IT WAS THE GAME THAT BROUGHT REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAMING TO THE MASSES AND USHERED IN THE CD-ROM ERA WITH ITS FAMOUS TONGUE-IN-CHEEK LIVE ACTION CUT-SCENES. IT SPAWNED A BATTALION OF IMITATORS AND GAVE US GAMING ICONS LIKE THE MAMMOTH TANK, ORBITAL ION CANNON AND THE BROTHERHOOD OF NOD. JOIN MIKE BEVAN AS HE NAVIGATES THE HISTORICAL MINEFIELD OF THE DEFINITIVE RTS FRANCHISE. AND WELCOME BACK, COMMANDER!

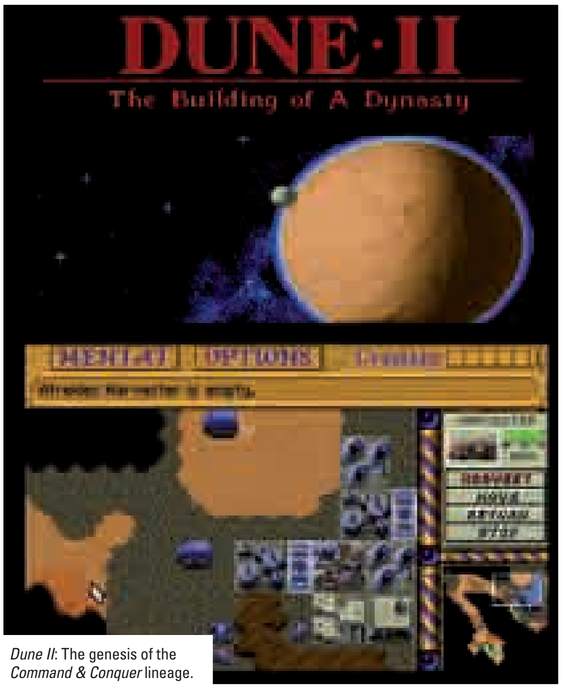


In the dozen years that players of Westwood's *Command & Conquer* titles, in their many iterations, have been pointing and clicking their way to global domination, the hugely popular franchise has more than lived up to the promise of its well-chosen name. It cornered the RTS market, developed into a worldwide branding phenomenon for publisher Electronic Arts, and became synonymous with the genre that it near single-handedly created. When the original *Command & Conquer* (retrospectively titled *Tiberian Dawn*) was released in 1995, it was for many players their first taste of, what was then, a completely new form of strategy war game. Dispensing with the often sluggish turn-based, hex-mapped format that often alienated all but the most avid of strategy buffs from the genre, *C&C* offered players an instantly immersive, living, breathing tabletop battlefield on their home PC.

With its immediately accessible mouse-driven interface, neatly rendered top-down perspective, and meticulously planned learning curve, the game hooked players in their thousands unlike any other strategy title before it. Building up a functioning base, mining the surrounding area for the all-important Tiberium ore, and amassing an army of small but destructively capable military units, with which to flatten the enemy's encampment, was a completely engrossing experience. Many players will no doubt reminisce fondly on their first taste of competitive play against a human opponent, or discovering the delights of squashing tiny pixilated enemy troops beneath the tracks of their Tiberium harvester.

Strangely enough though, for the game that would be the genesis of the *Command & Conquer* franchise, the primary resource wasn't Tiberium but a substance known as Spice, or Melange. *Dune II: The Building Of A Dynasty*, released in 1992 for PC, and later the Amiga and Mega Drive, was Westwood's first real-time strategy (or RTS) war game, and implemented many design features that would become key features of the *C&C* series. Although not the first RTS game ever produced (titles such as Technosoft's *Herzog Zwei* and Broderbund's *The Ancient Art Of War* had preceded it), *Dune II* was an incredibly well-rounded template for what was to come…

Based on the universe created in author Frank Herbert's famous sci-fi series, *Dune II* was the sequel to Virgin



Dune II: The genesis of the *Command & Conquer* lineage.

COMMAND & CONQUER A-Z

A is for Albert Einstein Apparently he time travelled back to the Twenties to remove Adolf Hitler from history, unwittingly causing the rise of tyrannical Russian dictator Stalin.* Not many people know that.

B is for Brett Sperry A major force behind *C&C*'s creation, Westwood's co-founder devised the famous *Command & Conquer* moniker, because let's face it, that's basically what the game was all about.

C is for Chronosphere Einstein's handy invention allows Allied *Red Alert* players to transport units across the map instantaneously.

D is for Dune II The 1993 release of Westwood's *Dune II: Battle For Arrakis* marked the birth of the modern real-time strategy game.

E is for Ezekiel's Wheel Nod's semi-invisible Stealth tank is one of the sneakiest *C&C* units of all time. Mounting an attack with a large squad of these babies is sure to annoy the heck out of your opponent in multiplayer mode.

F is for Flame Tank This incredibly destructive mobile flame-thrower, codenamed 'Devil's Tongue', makes very short work of light buildings and infantry. We like very much.

G is for Global Defence Initiative (GDI) Like a cross between the UN and Chuck Norris in *Delta Force*, these globetrotting Goody-Two-Shoes are the only guys capable of giving Nod a good kicking.

H is for Harvester In some ways the most valuable asset in *C&C*, without it you can't gather resources, won't get any money, and can't build any units. And it's great for squishing enemy troops.

I is for Ion Cannon Attached to an orbiting satellite, and able to wipe out large swathes of an enemy base in nanoseconds, this is the most devastating weapon in GDI's arsenal.

J is for Joseph Stalin The despotic Soviet premier is the Allies' nemesis in *Red Alert*.

K is for Kane The charismatic and slightly loopy leader of the Brotherhood of Nod is played by actor/director Joseph D Kucan, who is in reality a very nice man. At least we think he is.

L is for Louis Castle Co-founded Westwood Studios with Brett Sperry. Now vice-president of EA Los Angeles.

M is for Mammoth Tank Beloved of many fans, this enormous GDI tank is the most powerful land-based unit in the original *C&C: Tiberian Dawn*. It also makes a reappearance as an equally potent piece of Soviet hardware in *Red Alert*.

N is for Nod With their catchy motto "Peace, Unity, Brotherhood", the nutty Nod-ites are hellbent on creating a New World Order through media-manipulation, global terrorism and the wearing of attractive berets.

O is for Orca GDI's vertical-take-off (VTOL) jet has many roles in the series, including attack fighter in *Tiberian Dawn* and awesomely destructive bomber unit in *Tiberian Sun*.

P is for Prefabricated We really love how *C&C*'s structures sprout miraculously in fully constructed glory after you've clicked 'build'.

Q is for Quarter You won't be giving any in *Command & Conquer*.

R is for Red Alert After an auspicious start with the original *C&C* Westwood's famous 'Reds versus West' semi-sequel eclipsed its already-successful sibling in both popularity and playability.

S is for Sarejevo The setting for the siege of Kane's Temple of Nod, the final mission of *C&C*'s GDI campaign.

T is for Tiberium The all-important gatherable resource in the *C&C* franchise. Named after the River Tiber in Italy where it was discovered, Tiberium actually turns out to be something far more sinister than its initial beneficial properties might suggest.

U is for Udo Kier German actor who plays the Russian advisor Yuri in *Red Alert 2*.

V is for V2 Rocket Launcher Extremely irritating enemy unit (if you are playing the Allies) in *Red Alert*, which can wipe out half your base, from a considerable distance, if not dealt with fairly promptly. Forerunner to *Red Alert 2*'s even nastier V3.

W is for Westwood Studios Gods of the modern RTS that it created with *Dune II*, and of course *C&C*. Sadly missed, but its spirit lives on in Petroglyph Games.

X is for X-Rated Action Probably. There's certainly lots of screaming.

Y is for Yuri The Soviet telepath is one of the most memorable characters in the franchise. Has his revenge in the impressive expansion pack for *Red Alert 2*.

Z is for Zero Hour Expansion pack for *C&C: Generals*, and just about the only thing we could think of beginning with Z.

(*In an alternative universe)

THE HISTORY OF COMMAND & CONQUER

ROGUES GALLERY
AN IN-DEPTH GUIDE TO THE C&C UNIVERSE



MOBILE CONSTRUCTION VEHICLE (MCV)
The MCV is a rather slow-moving vehicle that can be deployed into a Construction Yard.

SHARED UNITS & STRUCTURES



CONSTRUCTION YARD
Vital base foundation structure. It's actually required to construct other buildings.

POWER PLANT
Gives power to buildings. The bigger your base, the more you'll need to keep it operational.

ADVANCED POWER PLANT
Similar to standard Power Plant, but with doubled output.

ORE REFINERY
Required to process Tiberium ore. Comes equipped with one Harvester unit.

HARVESTER
Essential for gathering Tiberium ore. Heavily armoured but extremely slow. Protect at all costs.

SILO
The Silo stores excess Tiberium. Without them, harvested credits may be lost.

HELIPAD
The Helipad allows the player to use aircraft (Orcas/Attack Helicopters)



MINIGUNNER
This is the standard infantry unit. Weak against vehicles, useful against other infantry.

ROCKET SOLDIER
Advanced infantry equipped with bazookas. Can attack air units, and vehicles.

ENGINEER
Can repair buildings and capture enemy structures. However, he is unarmed.

COMMANDO
Elite infantry unit. Kills enemy soldiers with one shot and can plant explosives on buildings.

CHINOOK TRANSPORT
This aerial transport unit is operated by both sides. Can only carry infantry, though.

COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE
Provides radar coverage across the map, if there's sufficient power.

REPAIR FACILITY
The Repair Facility lets you repair any of your vehicles, which may be damaged.

GDI UNITS & STRUCTURES



BARRACKS
The Barracks are the field-training centre for the various available infantry units.

WEAPONS FACTORY
The Weapons Factory is where you can produce all of the GDI's light and heavy vehicles.

GUARD TOWER
Guard post equipped with machine gun. Good against infantry. Bad against armour.

ADVANCED GUARD TOWER
Sturdier guard-post structure equipped with longer-range missiles.

ADVANCED COMMUNICATIONS
Lets you use the Ion Cannon super weapon. Requires lots of power.

GRENADIER
The Grenadier is useful as both a good defensive and a good attacking infantry unit.

HUM-VEE
The Hum-Vee is a fast but weak scouting vehicle. It comes armed with light machine gun.



MAMMOTH TANK
A heavily-armoured but slow 'super-tank'. Comes with dual cannon and missile racks.

ROCKET LAUNCHER
Great for launching ranged attacks from distance, but useless in close combat.

ORCA
GDI's sleek and useful VTOL attack craft. It comes armed with air-to-surface missiles.

ARMOURED PERSONNEL CARRIER (APC)
Fast-moving infantry transport. Carries up to five units.

MEDIUM TANK
The staple GDI armoured unit. Comes equipped with armour-piercing cannon.

HAND OF NOD
This is the Nod equivalent of the GDI's Barracks. You can train infantry here.

AIRSTRIP
Equivalent of GDI's Weapon Factory. Allows delivery of vehicles by cargo plane.

NOD UNITS & STRUCTURES



TURRET
Gun emplacement that is armed with a cannon. A very good defence against vehicles.

OBELISK OF LIGHT
Deadly laser-emitting defensive structure. Requires large amounts of power, though.

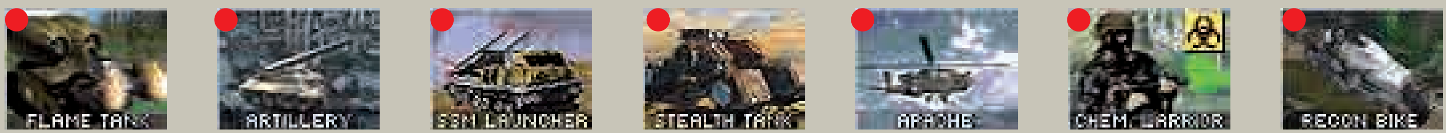
SAM SITE
Nod's anti-aircraft defence. Makes short work of Orcas and other airborne units.

TEMPLE OF NOD
Nod's ultimate goal is the construction of this temple, which has nuclear strike abilities.

FLAMETHROWER INFANTRY
The slowest infantry class, but can wipe out enemies in seconds.

BUGGY
Another fast vehicle, which can be very useful for carrying out hit-and-run attacks.

LIGHT TANK
Nod's basic armour unit is the fastest tank, at the expense of weak defence.



FLAME TANK
Roasts infantry and structures with ease, but a couple of tank shells and it's history.

MOBILE ARTILLERY
The Artillery is long-range attack unit. However, it has a weak defence.

SURFACE-TO-SURFACE LAUNCHER (SSM)
This is the ultimate long-range attack unit. Fires napa'm missiles.

STEALTH TANK
This 'cloak-able' and fast light tank is invisible to most enemy units until it actually attacks

APACHE ATTACK HELICOPTER
Less advanced than the GDI's Orca, but it still packs a punch.

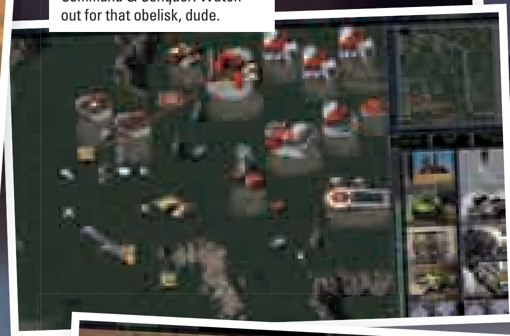
CHEMICAL WARRIOR
Very Similar to the Flamethrower but armed with toxic Tiberium gas.

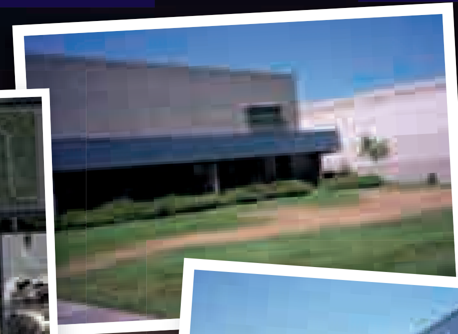
RECON BIKE
The Recon Bike is a pretty fast-moving, but lightly armoured scouting unit.



Detail of the image reflected in the soldier's goggles on *C&C*'s cover.

Command & Conquer: Watch out for that obelisk, dude.





Westwood's headquarters in Las Vegas





Command & Conquer: A mysteriously localised nuclear detonation thwarts GDI.

Interactive's original adventure game, licensed from the David Lynch movie adaptation rather than the novels. "We were working with, and quickly became acquired by, Virgin Interactive," says Mike Legg, a Westwood veteran of 17 years, now working at Petroglyph Games. "They'd done the original *Dune* game by Cryo, and thought that an RTS game would fit nicely into the *Dune* universe. We were also playing *Herzog Zwei* on the Mega Drive at the time." Joe Bostic, lead programmer and co-designer of *Dune II*, *C&C* and *Red Alert*, remembers a number of further influences. "We were playing *Populous*, *Military Madness* and *Civilization* and thought a game grown out of the combined features of these titles would be great fun to play," he says.

Westwood co-founders Brett Sperry and Louis Castle were equally instrumental in moving the RTS concept forward with the *Dune* licence. The company's recent RPG *Eye Of The Beholder* had demonstrated that real-time decision making was a potentially very exciting strategy-gaming element, and they wanted to take the concept into new territory. "Real-time provides more stress to the player," explains Joe, "which is part of the draw of this type of game."

"The first thing implemented in *Dune II* was real-time vehicle combat," he continues. "Then we added base building and spice harvesting. This process allowed playing the game in some form or another throughout a large part of the development process. Playing the game allowed the luxury of refining the mechanics, which helps with building a streamlined game. Another benefit over *Herzog Zwei* is that we had the advantage of a mouse and keyboard. This greatly facilitated precise player control, which enabled the player to give orders to individual units. The mouse, and the direct control it allowed, was critical in making the RTS genre possible."

Dune II crystallised many major design features, which would become characteristic of the subsequent *C&C* series. The concept of sending out a 'harvester' unit to collect valuable minerals and gain income for building military units and structures came directly from the *Dune* universe. The radar 'mini-map' was borrowed from *Civilization*. The idea of creating separate playable factions (the Atreides, Ordos and Harkonnen) with their own separate story, characters and unique weapons, was influenced by Westwood's roots in the RPG genre. *Dune II* pioneered the idea of 'tech-trees' in a real-time strategy game, with advanced units and structures becoming available once the player had built or acquired more basic ones. "This sort of tech-tree hierarchy felt natural and probably comes from my experience with the more complex elements of tabletop paper war-games that I was a big fan of," Joe reveals.

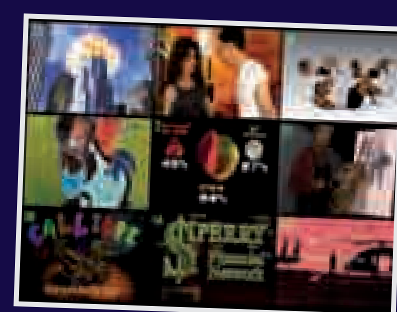
"MUCH OF THE CONTROL INTERFACE FOR C&C WAS BASED ON THE TEMPLATE MADE DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF DUNE II"

Aside from the harvesters and refineries, many of the basic structures and units created for *Dune II* would be used, in modified form, in *C&C*. Wind-traps (power stations), construction yards, radar posts and defensive gun-emplacements would all become integral structures. The dune trikes and quad-bikes became Nod's bikes and attack buggies. The hugely powerful Devastator was a forerunner to GDI's formidable Mammoth tank. Similarly, much of the control interface for *C&C* would be based on the template created during the development of *Dune II*. "I remember that we were also really excited about having spoken, digitised unit responses in the game," adds Mike. "I think it was the first time that we had voice as a regular game feature."

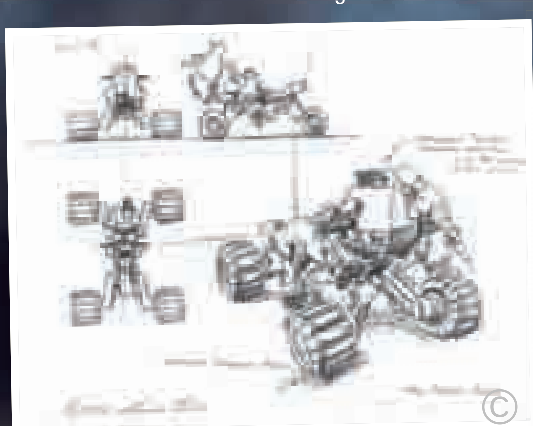
Dune II proved to be a considerable commercial and critical success. Brett Sperry wanted to take the genre

AT LEAST YOUR MOTHER TIPPED WELL...

The FMV intro for the original *Command & Conquer* is a glorious parody of mid-Nineties multi-channel saturated broadcasting and the burgeoning 'MTV generation'. Kicking off with a news report covering Nod's terrorist bombing of the fictional 'World Grain Centre' in Vienna, we then proceed to channel-hop through a selection of random, and deliberately terrible spoof TV shows and adverts, interspersed with further factual snippets on the Tiberium phenomenon. The sequence is given a sinister edge by the shadowy manipulation of persons unseen, prophesising the rise and subsequent global dominance of the hand of Nod. Mind you, TV like this would probably make us want to go out and blow stuff up, too.



C&C: The Intro – Can you spot the subtle reference to Westwood supremo Brett Sperry, readers?



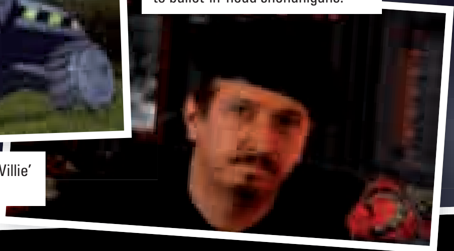




Concept illustrations for Nod's attack Buggy, GDI's Hum-Vee and an unused Orca Carryall.



C&C's Tiberium harvester, nicknamed 'Big Willie' by the team. No, we don't know why either.



Westwood artist Eric Gooch as Seth in *Command & Conquer*, prior to bullet-in-head shenanigans.

further, with an original property rather than a licence. The initial proposal was a complete fantasy setting, but then-recent events, principally the Gulf War, inspired a move towards a more realistic, modern military theme, with a sci-fi twist. *Command & Conquer* would be the result of many thousands of man hours during a protracted three-year development cycle. "I think Brett came up with the name. Although, before the military theme was finalised we had some RTS fantasy ideas with working titles such as '*Command & Conjure*' and '*Conquered Kingdom*'," reveals Joe. "I remember we thought that two same-letter combinations were strong, like *D&D* for *Dungeons & Dragons*," says Mike.

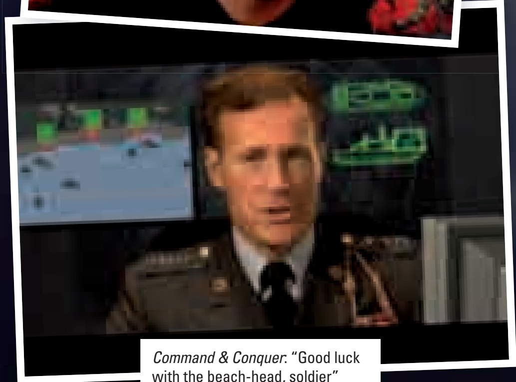
"One of the primary goals for *C&C* was to streamline the interface," continues Joe. "The drag-select mouse interface was a breakthrough. In addition, the context-sensitive command mouse-click was another. Being able to click on the ground to move, an enemy to attack, and a friendly unit to select, greatly improved gameplay. Another big improvement was to lump production buildings into a sidebar menu choice so that selecting a factory in order to pick a unit to construct would be more efficient."

The basic, tiled appearance and primitive, hand-drawn sprites of *Dune II* evolved into more photo-realistic semi-rendered units and structures. "The units in the game were not rendered directly," says Joe, "but hand retouched after being rendered at various angles. It took artist skill to make such low-resolution renders into something that looked very good." AI and unit path finding also improved considerably. "The AI in *C&C* was completely hard coded," Joe continues, "but did introduce the concept of AI teams so that the computer would send groups to attack rather than just individual units." It wasn't completely perfect though. "I'll never forget people referring to 'Big Willie's School of Harvester Driving' due to some of the wacky find-path shenanigans that harvesters used, to get back to the base," chuckles Mike.

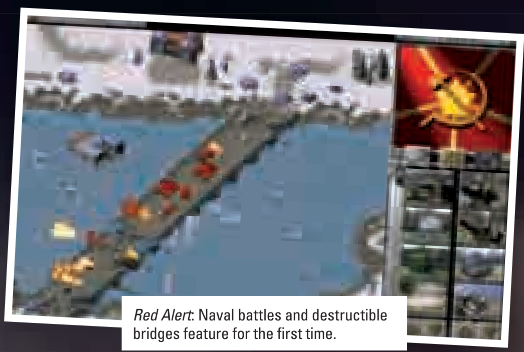
One of the most memorable aspects of the original *C&C* is perhaps the game's slickly produced and entertaining storyline, as presented by its famous FMV cut-scenes, which took advantage of the then-new CD-ROM format. The vivid portrayal of the struggle between the squeaky-clean Global Defence Initiative (GDI) and the nefarious Brotherhood of Nod added an extra immersive dimension to the title. Predictably, creating an all-new, original premise proved more difficult than using an existing universe like *Dune II*. "We created a '*C&C* bible' that contained backstory and other information and reference materials," Joe explains. "Not all reference material was written. The old B, sci-fi movie classic *Monolith Monsters* was a key inspiration for Tiberium. However, creating the movie scripts and characters was a new experience for us."

"I remember Brett saying that he thought it would have a ton of impact if the characters in the game looked at and spoke directly to the player," remembers Mike. "For the first *C&C*, we used a lot of local Las Vegas actors and Westwood staff to appear in the movies. We also had anchors from some of the local news stations making appearances. Artist Eric 'Seth' Gooch rocks!" he laughs. "When we did the first *C&C*, we had a very small, simple studio and green screen. When we got to *Tiberian Sun*, the sound stage had tons of amazing equipment." Despite the relatively limited resources available for Westwood's first shot at live-action video, it still consumed a considerable chunk of the game's budget. "The general talk at the time was that about half the budget was FMV-related and the other half was everything else," acknowledges Joe.

Incredibly, the most memorable character in *Command & Conquer*'s story was portrayed by another Westwood staff member drafted in to bolster the acting ranks on the production. "I had the pleasure of being buddies with Joe Kucan in high school," remembers Mike, on the subject of the *C&C* production director, and the face of enigmatic lead villain Kane. "Joe has always been hugely charismatic since back then," he continues. "He was very active in school and local theatre, and was always a big talent. Joe was a project producer for some of his time at Westwood, and he was excellent to work



Command & Conquer: "Good luck with the beach-head, soldier"



Red Alert: Naval battles and destructible bridges feature for the first time.



Red Alert: We'd erase him from history, too. Just for wearing that suit.











CONSOLE VERSIONS OF COMMAND & CONQUER

COMMAND & CONQUER – SONY PLAYSTATION
A solid and very fast conversion which works well with the D-pad. It's speedier than both the original and the Saturn release, but we noticed a bit of slowdown on some of the larger maps. This version contains both the *Covert Operations* expansion missions and a number of levels exclusive to the PlayStation. Let down by the absence of a two-player link-up option though.

COMMAND & CONQUER – SEGA SATURN
The FMV compression is slightly ropey compared to the PlayStation, but the game is marginally nicer looking here with better visual effects, less blocky explosions, and proper sprite translucencies. One annoyance is the 'inertial' movement of the cursor, which can't be turned off, and it lacks the bonus missions, but this is the most authentic console version.

COMMAND & CONQUER – NINTENDO 64
Looking Glass Studio's revisionist N64 conversion was one of the first instances of a completely polygon-rendered RTS game. The 3D terrain doesn't really affect the gameplay too much, but it certainly looks pretty, as do the rather spiffy polygon explosions and effects. Sadly, there's no space on the cart for the video cut-scenes, but it contains the *Covert Operations* missions.

RED ALERT – SONY PLAYSTATION
It's a rather visually unappealing port, but *Red Alert* on the PlayStation captures the fast-paced gameplay of the PC original very nicely. Best of all, Westwood has finally added a link-up option, which can be set up with one copy of the game, (one player uses the Allied disc, the other the Soviet). Those level pass codes are still a pain in single-player mode though.

RED ALERT: RETALIATION – SONY PLAYSTATION
Gathering together the PC's *Aftermath* and *Counterstrike* mission expansion packs and adding exclusive FMV briefings, *Retaliation* is aimed at those that breezed through the original *Red Alert* and can take down a Tesla Coil without flinching. There's also a proper save system in *Retaliation*, rather than the interminable level pass codes of previous outings.

with. He was a wonderful presence as both a director and actor in the *C&C* movies. All the actors loved working with him, and really respected his work."

Rather than a straight 'rock-paper-scissors' style of balancing, *Command & Conquer*'s two sides had very different characteristics. GDI's technology tended towards heavily armoured but slow-moving units like the Heavy and Mammoth tanks. Nod's forces used lightly armoured, but faster, vehicles, best suited to swift hit-and-run attacks. Units like Nod's Stealth tank added an extra, sneakier dimension for players. The final steps of the development of *Tiberian Dawn* involved extensive playtesting, and balancing the game until the two factions felt evenly matched. "Balancing was made much easier because we played the game constantly. Every evening we would play and then the next day adjustments were made to the units and then play would continue that night. This process was repeated over and over. The unit values were hard coded so in addition to finalising features and fixing bugs, I was hand tweaking the unit stats."

"We had so much fun playing the game during development that in some way the success was not a total surprise," Joe admits. "Yeah, it was hard to get people to go home at night," agrees Mike. "The *C&C* team was definitely on to something big." As the game did the rounds of computer trade shows, public feedback was strongly positive. "I remember when the Flame tanks were first unveiled in London at ECTS, and the crowd would get bigger and bigger every time I gave my demo. When infantry caught on fire and started running around in panic, the crowd would cheer!"

Ultimately, the LAN multiplay aspect of *C&C* is the feature that many would find the most gripping. The ability to wage strategic open warfare against a human opponent had never been explored like this before. Westwood had the foresight to release the game on two CD-ROMs, one for each faction, allowing competitive play from one copy of the game. Designer Joe Bostic's experiences likely mirror those of many at the time. "The LAN play made *C&C* really stand out in my opinion," he says. "It was the first time I could pit my army against an opponent in a virtual sandbox battlefield."

On its release, the impact of the game, commercially and within the industry, was phenomenal. Freed of *Dune II*'s niche sci-fi universe, and embracing a more contemporary real-world battle sphere, *C&C*'s appeal was instant among avid PC-owning gamers the world over. Even rival developers were amazed by the game. Origin employees were apparently so taken with it that they bought up the majority of copies in the area around their offices in Austin to set up multiplayer tournaments.

The demand for further content spawned an expansion pack, *The Covert Operations*, with 15 more difficult single-player missions and a number of new multiplayer maps. Another spin-off, *Command & Conquer: Sole Survivor*, was an interesting idea that unfortunately failed to gather much of a following with fans. An online multiplayer game, where up to 50 players controlled a separate *C&C* unit in a deathmatch scenario, it was an experiment that led to the *C&C* multiplayer mode in the forthcoming *Renegade*. "The underlying game engine was largely unmodified, but the game design of *Sole Survivor* really needed an engine specifically designed for that sort of gameplay. It could have been much more than it was if we only had more resources to apply to it," confesses Joe.

Although the *Command & Conquer* 'Tiberium' universe was undoubtedly appealing, it was arguably surpassed by the game's first 'standalone' sequel, a

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

SANDWORMS AND C&C: WESTWOOD'S TAKE ON THE DUNE UNIVERSE

The trilogy of real-time strategy games based on the *Dune* universe make up an attractive, if rather eclectic collection, and are an interesting alternative to *C&C*. All feature beautiful presentation and impressive attention to detail in re-creating the bleak desert wilderness of *Dune*'s Planet Arrakis



DUNE II – THE BUILDING OF A DYNASTY (AKA BATTLE FOR ARRAKIS)
Released: 1992
Systems: PC, Amiga, Mega Drive
Set several hundred years prior to the events of the film, Westwood's first real-time strategy war game immersed the player in the story of the first 'Spice War' on Arrakis. By modern standards *Dune II* is obviously primitive. Units can only be selected individually, not grouped, the construction interface is a little unwieldy compared to future *C&C* games, and visually it's a little rough on the eyes. However, it remains a classic, trailblazing title.



DUNE 2000
Released: 1998
Systems: PC, PlayStation
The remit for this 1998 sequel was to update Westwood's *Dune* franchise for the new millennium. Adding an expensive-looking FMV plot, *Dune 2000* is an almost direct remake of *Dune II*, designed to go for the nostalgic jugular. It's certainly very atmospheric, much influenced by the visual style of the David Lynch film adaptation, and with a superb soundtrack, but having to place all structures on concrete yet again starts to grate badly here.



EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE
Released: 2001
System: PC
The final *Dune* real-time strategy takes the ambitious step of rendering Arrakis in full 3D, and the result is a blisteringly fast-paced and visually exciting title. Structures can now be built directly on rock, and although the game does tend to favour amassing large numbers of units and then rushing the enemy, it's an enjoyable revision of the series. The giant sandworms are particularly impressive. You also get Michael Dorn, minus the Cornish pasty stuck to his forehead.



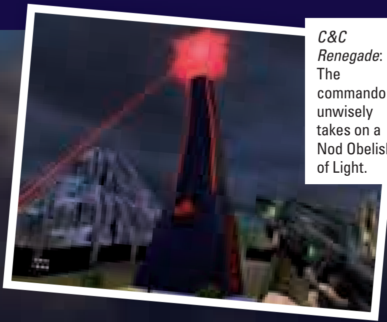
Tiberian Sun's units, like this Titan mech, were far more futuristic than in the original *C&C*.



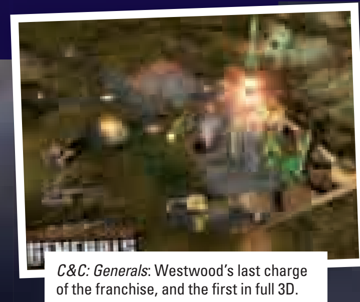
Joseph Kucan directs James Earl Jones on the set of *Tiberian Sun*.

"RATHER THAN A STRAIGHT 'ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS' STYLE OF BALANCING, COMMAND & CONQUER'S TWO SIDES HAD VERY DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS"

THE HISTORY OF COMMAND & CONQUER



C&C Renegade: The commando unwisely takes on a Nod Obelisk of Light.



C&C: Generals: Westwood's last charge of the franchise, and the first in full 3D.

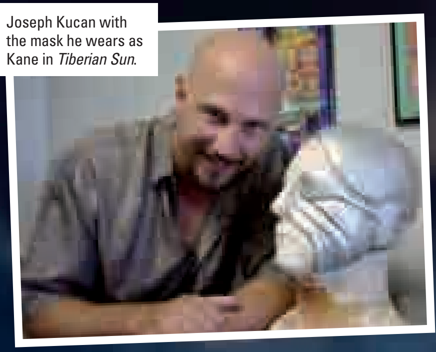
EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE BALD BAD GUY



He's well known as the face, and shiny cranium, of Kane in *C&C*, but not many people realise that Joseph Kucan also directed the franchise's famous FMV scenes, as well as those of other Westwood titles such as *Blade Runner* and *Dune 2000*. **RG** caught up with Joe to ask him about his role on the original *C&C*. Was it a fairly rough-and-ready experience? "It was, actually," he confirms. "Scripts were changing as game design was tweaked and toyed with, and re-shoots were a daily occurrence. At the time, our studio space consisted of a single blue screen painted on the back wall of an upstairs warehouse. Moving cameras were an impossible dream and screen size was limited to a matchbook-sized square. I never knew what the finished product looked like until it was compressed and locked in the game. The original shoot consisted of a week and a half of filming. Myself, Felix Kupis, Eric Gooch and Paul Bastardo made up the entirety of the crew on that first C&C."

How does he view the huge popularity of the character he portrayed, and recently returned to, in EA's *C&C 3*? "I think Kane's ironic humour plays a big part in keeping players interested in him. He seems to have secrets, and knows more than he's letting on. Also, by now, most players know me personally. And since I'm such a repulsive and annoying human, I think most of them keep coming back hoping that this time, they'll get to see Kane curb-stomped into a wet, pulpy mass of bone and gore."

For Joe, there was one particular highlight on the first *C&C* – shooting Eric Gooch, playing the Kane-lackey Seth, in the head at point-blank range. "The best part about that was, you know who the artist was that was assigned to draw in Seth's brain-splatter, frame by frame?" he laughs. "You guessed it: Eric Gooch."



Joseph Kucan with the mask he wears as Kane in *Tiberian Sun*.

product which had begun life as the so-called '*C&C0*'. This time around the team took the unusual approach of creating revisionist history with an 'alternative' World War II scenario pitching the West against Soviet Russia.

"*Red Alert* was intended to be a WWII-themed expansion pack for *C&C*," explains Joe. "During development we added more units and features to the game and it became strong enough to ship as a standalone product. At the time, we weren't thinking it had anything to do with the *C&C* storyline, but existed as a separate timeline. A parallel dimension so to speak, as indicated by the opening movie showing Einstein sending a young Hitler through time and spawning an alternate history where *Red Alert* takes place."

"I started at Westwood right after the original *Command & Conquer* shipped," says Petroglyph's Adam Isgreen, a lead designer on many subsequent *C&C* games. "The original intention was to do a straight-up WWII game, with nothing to tie it into the *C&C* universe. However, as we evolved the story, we realised that we found straight-up history really boring for a game. There were plenty of turn-based WWII games, and that's exactly what we were trying to get away from. As the concept developed, we realised we had a great opportunity to utilise this game as the prequel to *C&C*, and had even created this 'duelling scientists' plot about Einstein and Tesla, both on opposite sides in this massive tech war, with the technologies each created getting crazier and crazier as the game went on."

A particularly memorable presence in the *Red Alert* storyline, and a highlight of many a gamer's formative years, was the kick-ass female operative Tanya. "We wanted a cool, and sexy, counterpart to the commando from *C&C*," remembers Joe. "The commando had such a strong personality that providing a similarly themed character for *Red Alert* was a must."

"I was very much into John Woo movies at the time," continues Adam. "*Red Alert* demanded something new and something we'd not done before in *C&C* – a strong female character. Originally, there were going to be two Allied commando-type units, Tanya and Megan. They were both Irish ex-IRA soldiers. Megan was the explosives expert, while Tanya was the 'pistolero', gunning down everything in her way. We realised pretty quickly that we didn't have space to have two commando-type characters, so we kept Tanya and Megan got sidelined. As the script was written, we realised what a great character Tanya was, so her arsenal of abilities and her presence in missions grew."

"*Red Alert* was a blast to make," enthuses Adam. "Everyone in the studio was playing it late into the evenings, and with every new addition we'd get working, the game just got better and better. Dogs, Tesla Coils, the Chronosphere and the Iron Curtain, it was just wonderful to play. The team working on the *Lands Of Lore* games were constantly yelled at by management because they were playing *Red Alert* multiplayer instead of working on their own project."

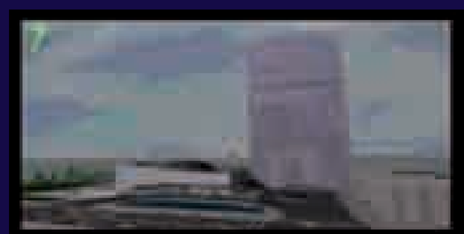
"Working on a project that everyone is invested in and has full commitment to is an incredible experience. It shows you how game development is when it's at its best, and *Red Alert* was a great example of that at Westwood. I clearly remember playing the game towards the end of development until 3am routinely, and Brett telling us all as we wrapped up, 'Okay, everyone, we'll see you back at 9am.' And no one complained even once. We were all dead tired, but all of us would come in with smiles on our faces because the game was just damn fun."

"RED ALERT REMAINS A FAN FAVOURITE OF THE C&C COMMUNITY, ECLIPSED IN POPULARITY ONLY BY RED ALERT 2"

Released in 1996, *Red Alert* was another huge hit for Westwood, and the company's free online servers were soon inundated with thousands of players taking advantage of the multiplayer capacity of the new game. Two subsequent mission packs, *The Aftermath* and *Counterstrike*, were produced by London-based developer Intelligent Games. Louis Castle admits that it could have easily added a third. The game remains a particular fan favourite of the *C&C* community, eclipsed in popularity only by *Red Alert 2*.

Although *Red Alert* had been a great success, fans were hankering for a true sequel and continuation of the *Tiberian* saga. The result, *Command & Conquer:*

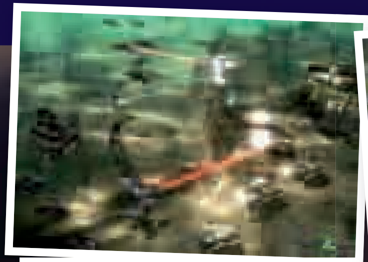
REAL LIFE VS C&C



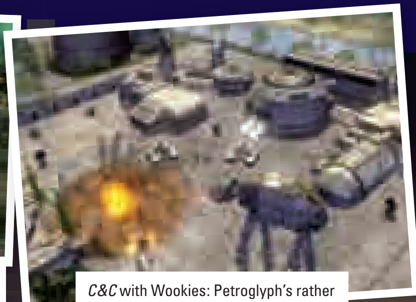
The original *Command & Conquer*'s storyline may well have been a work of fiction, but it had remarkable foresight in predicting certain elements of our present-day political climate. The game's portrayal of a shifting global conflict arising from the bombing of a high-profile financial landmark features a contemporary military coalition (GDI) hunting down a quasi-religious terrorist group (Nod). "Although we chose modern military as the general theme of the units, there was no specific reference to real-world factions," explains Joe Bostic. "The closest one could call a reference was GDI as an outgrowth of the UN merged with the US military, but GDI comes without the baggage of the UN and without being tied to a particular country."

Nod's supremely skilful use and manipulation of cyberspace and the media is another thread explored by the story. As **Retro Gamer** goes to print, so-called 'Cyber Terrorism' has recently become a buzz word in the press following the recent conviction of Younis Tsouli, so called Terrorist 007, jailed for distributing extremist Al-Qaeda propaganda from a number of websites run out of his bedroom in London.

Although none of this could have been completely foreseen back in 1995 when the game was released, Louis Castle admits the seeds of the story definitely evolved from real events of the time, particularly tensions in the Gulf and the Balkans. "War was in the news and the threat of terrorism was on everyone's mind. I think that's what made it resonate with people," says Louis Castle, "because it felt like it could happen any day. And of course it did."



EA's recent *C&C 3: Tiberium Wars*, the only game in the series not produced by Westwood Studios.



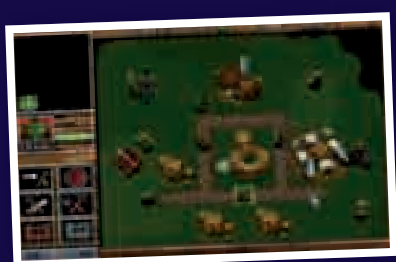
C&C with Wookies: Petroglyph's rather impressive *Star Wars: Empire At War*.

BLIZZARD VS WESTWOOD

Back at the dawn of real-time strategy, it didn't go unnoticed that a certain Blizzard Entertainment had an uncanny knack of 'borrowing' certain elements of Westwood's games, in particular on its first RTS title *Warcraft: Orcs And Humans*. "Originally, when I played *Warcraft*, the similarities between it and *Dune II* were pretty… blatant, so I didn't know what to think," admits Adam Isgreen. "Even the menus of the two games are arranged in exactly the same order, in the exact same pixel positions on the screen."

Mike Legg agrees. "I definitely noticed it, but we also really liked their games," he says. Blizzard's rather copycat approach, at least initially, caused rather strained relations and a certain sense of rivalry between the two companies. "We always tried to be very complimentary when we met Blizzard people at trade shows in regards to their games," explains Adam. "Most of the Blizzard people we met were very nice, but some weren't. The not nice ones tended to be just flat-out insulting and arrogant, so it wasn't a really pleasant relationship in the early years."

"As Blizzard's games went on, they certainly developed their own flair and created some highly polished products," says Mike. "They've made some amazingly fun and easy to play games. I was always, and still am today, very impressed with their balance and polish." Joe Bostic prefers to take the comparative similarities as a compliment. "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," he says. "And in this case, we were very flattered indeed."





They died with their boots on… A press advertisement for *Red Alert*.

Tiberian Sun, is notable for one of the most notoriously drawn-out development periods in gaming history. Set 30 years after the events in *Dawn*, on a Tiberium-ravaged Earth, the game's post-apocalyptic feel and overtly sci-fi theme was a big departure from the original's more recognisable contemporary setting.

"The main aims were to progress the story and give the player more options in combat," says Joe. For Adam Isgreen, working on the game was somewhat of a whirlwind experience. "The *Tiberian Sun* development cycle was crazy," he admits. "We wanted to make terrain more interactive, make a grander game, and make it even more cinematic than previous *C&C* games. We were pushing a whole bunch of new technologies (deformable terrain, bridges, underground units and so on) for RTS games rather than focusing on a few key elements to enhance and making those great. In the end this really hurt us because there wasn't a lot of code that was left from the original games to rely on; everything was new, resulting in bugs and the constant refinement of the entire engine, which slowed development."

"As the game wore on, we also had some unreasonable deadlines that the team didn't believe in but management swore we'd make. We didn't, and the crunching and morale hits were pretty serious for a while. In the end, *Sun*'s development was as if we took ten steps away from *C&C* and *Red Alert*, rather than three or four. The big takeaway from that project is that a sequel doesn't have to reinvent the wheel, just make what was fun in the first game better. I think we simply strove to make something too grand and that delayed us greatly. Fortunately, the game was still fun at the end of the day, and the *Firestorm* expansion did address many of the things we wanted to get in originally but couldn't."

Finally unveiled in 1999, and four years in the making, *Tiberian Sun*'s reception was mixed; the result of a combination of factors including impossibly high public expectations and the frustratingly long wait. Seen as revisiting the same territory as Blizzard's exceptional *Starcraft*, released the previous year, it required a fairly high-spec PC for the time to be fully enjoyable. Still, the energetic plot, featuring sci-fi stalwarts Michael Biehn and voice of Darth Vader, James Earl Jones, was a lot of fun. "He did the game because his grandson loved our games and begged him to do it," laughs Adam.

Refining the *Tiberian Sun* engine, Westwood's next standalone *C&C* release was a superb return to form. *Red Alert 2* told the story of a whole-scale Soviet invasion of the US, and featured the most impressive and well-produced FMV storyline of the franchise to date. With an even greater emphasis on the 'weird science' and technology of the original *Red Alert*, the deliberately campy plot, fast-paced and beautifully balanced gameplay and much-improved graphics gave *C&C* fans the RTS sequel they had been hoping for. Outlandish units such as dolphins, rocketeers and giant squids added enormously to the game's entertainment value. "With the addition of the *Yuri's Revenge* expansion to *Red Alert 2*, I think the Irvine team pretty much perfected real-time strategy in its time," says Louis Castle. "You could take a unit type and stick it inside another and pretty much change its functionality, and in this way you were constantly discovering new units that could be used on the battlefield."

Westwood's next move for the franchise, *C&C: Renegade*, was an unusual one. "We wanted to create an FPS in the *C&C* universe," says Joe. "The best part of

> "TIBERIAN SUN'S RECEPTION WAS MIXED; THE RESULT OF HIGH PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS AND THE LONG WAIT"

Renegade turned out to be the team base-versus-base mode. It would have been nice to have identified this earlier in development so that more of the game could have been focused around that style of gameplay." *Renegade* failed to meet Westwood's sales targets, meaning that a proposed sequel never saw the light of day. "After *Renegade* launched, we'd also created a cool demo for *Renegade 2*, set in the *Red Alert* universe. It was amazing to be running along the ground and see Kirov's dropping bombs from above," says Mike.

The last *C&C* release of the Westwood era, *Generals*, used the SAGE 3D Engine, which had driven *Renegade*. An attempt to explore a modern theatre of warfare using the *C&C* style, the game's three factions, the US, China and the Global Liberation Army reflected a more contemporary power-struggle than the series had done since *Tiberian Dawn*. Dispensing with the traditional FMV cut-scenes and resource harvesting of the older games, *Generals* and its spin-off *Zero Hour* were fine, but they do feel like interlopers in the *C&C* lineage.

In 2003, EA, who acquired Westwood from Virgin in 1998, closed the company's Las Vegas and Irvine studios, and relocated those willing of its 100 or so employees to EA LA. Joe, Mike and Adam now work at Petroglyph Games, a studio formed using the talents of those Westwood employees who declined to move, and they have continued to use the skills they gained in creating the *C&C* series on RTS projects like *Star Wars: Empire At War* and *Universe At War: Earth Assault*.

Work on what would become *Command & Conquer 3 Tiberium Wars* had begun before the split, again utilising the SAGE Engine. The game's release in 2007 marked the franchise's return to the console format and brought the *Tiberian* saga to a new generation of gamers. Although not responsible for the final product, the Petroglyph team were impressed. "Seeing Kane back on the screen in his full glory warmed my heart," says Mike. "It felt like a bit of the magic and inspiration from the original series was rekindled. Especially with the use of FMV when the industry as a whole had moved away from it for so long," agrees Joe.

The legacy of *C&C* and its precursor *Dune II* is certainly appreciated by Joe and Mike, who were at Westwood from the start. They both divulge their personal favourites of the games they worked on. "I'm most proud of *Dune II* for the trailblazing aspect of game design, and the original *C&C* for the sheer fast dynamics and balance of multiplayer," says Joe. "I loved the *Red Alert* series," admits Mike. "With its wild storyline and weird science, it had so much character, style and imagination. And Tesla Technology!"

We couldn't resist posing the obvious question to Joe and his colleagues. Would they like to work on another *C&C*? "You'd have to ask EA!" jokes Adam. "Of course! If the opportunity arose, working on another game would be great," says Joe. "I love *C&C* and *Red Alert*. I'd be thrilled to work and play in those universes again in the future," adds Mike. We'd be rather interested, too.

Grateful thanks to Petroglyph Games and PlanetCnC.com for their assistance in compiling this article.

ETERNAL CHAMPIONS

THE MEGA DRIVE'S GREAT WHITE HYPE





- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

The beloved beat-'em-up, it's a funny old genre when you sit back and think about it. A single panoramic screen viewed through a non-panoramic lens (essentially), inhabited by characters with a handful of moves – about a third you'll cling protectively to and the rest you'll accidentally stumble into during battle – and it even spurs some developers to want to protect the environment from character-design pollution by recycling their characters.

Eternal Champions was released on the Mega Drive into a swathe of hype and high expectations back in 1993. Early TV broadcasts of Andy Crane hawking the game on *Bad Influence!* using the audacious Sega Activator peripheral (if memory serves correctly) had many thinking that they were witnessing the arrival of a potential *Street Fighter II* beater, resulting in lots of people rushing out to purchase the game.

To be fair, the game isn't a horrific beast. In fact, it's crammed with a few functions and options, it looks fantastic, plays reasonably well and is blessed with a roster of quirky characters all trained in the arts of authentic fighting techniques. The game also boasts a variation of the stage fatalities in *Mortal Kombat*, and a meter that depletes each time you perform a special move, therefore preventing fight veterans from overbearing the matches with a continuous flurry of projectiles and actually adding a subtle sense of strategy to the fights.

The game's backstory also showed a nuance of creativity – something many fighters never spend their time worrying about. Here the synopsis draw is time travel. Nine dead fighters pulled from different periods in time are brought together by the Eternal Champion for the chance to avert the cause of their death in quantum leap fashion.

Eternal Champions was certainly no *Street Fighter*, but it was a successful title that garnered enough fans for a Mega CD sequel and a cancelled Saturn project that sadly never saw the light of day, proving the only thing eternal about the game was its title.


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GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

Bizarre Creation's Robotron-inspired shooter first appeared on Project Gotham 2, with a new iteration appearing with every sequel. Darran Jones takes a look at the latest release and finds out how it went from a brilliant freebie to a must-own Wii release

If you have access to an Xbox or Xbox 360, chances are you've heard of Bizarre Creation's excellent *Geometry Wars* franchise. Originally released free with *Project Gotham Racing 2* – in the form of an arcade machine that you could visit in your garage – the series found huge success when the sequel, *Retro Evolved*, was released simultaneously on both *Project Gotham Racing 3* – as a timed demo – and Xbox Live Arcade, where it became one of the most popular and most downloaded titles on the service.

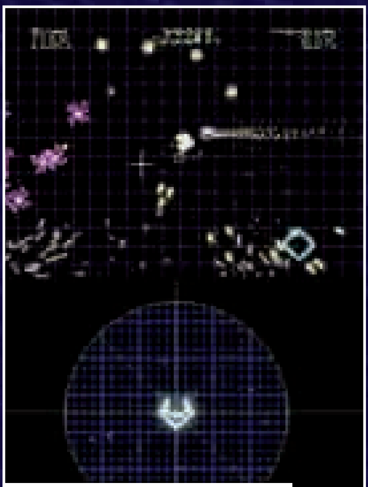
Retro Evolved was followed up 22 months later in the form of *Geometry Wars: Waves*, which ditched the extra lives of *Retro Evolved* in favour of a single ship and continuous waves of intricately designed enemies.

Waves isn't the final piece of the *Geometry Wars* puzzle, as Sierra, Kuju and Bizarre Creations have recently released *Galaxies* for both Nintendo's Wii and DS. Considering all previous titles were either given away for free, or cost a tiny amount of cash, we were intrigued to discover how *Galaxies*' creation originated. After all, it's not every company who has the balls to release something that can be found for a fraction of the price on other consoles.

"It came about through numerous discussions between Bizarre Creations and Sierra," begins Roger Carpenter, Sierra's senior producer. "What started out as being just a '*Retro Evolved* with bells on' concept, became something much larger and eventually the game you see on the shelves now. Some of the principles were there from the start – multiplayer, online scores, new controls – but a lot of the directions didn't come about until much later in the developmental process."

After the preliminary discussions had taken place, it was time to decide on a developer who would be able to do *Galaxies* justice and deliver a title that could not only compete with full-price titles – both the Wii and DS versions retail for a wallet friendly £24.99 – but also stay true to its arcade roots. Kuju, who was no stranger to working on Nintendo hardware, was quickly drafted in and was able to turn the project around incredibly quickly.

"Both games had a cycle of seven months, from pressing the development button to gold master – and that includes pre-production time. We didn't have any *Galaxies* play until month three, and didn't start authoring the battles in earnest until month five," continues Carpenter. "It was a hardcore development and no mistake. The problems faced weren't anything out of the ordinary as far as the developmental process was concerned, but they were possibly magnified due to the short time frame. Making control schemes that worked, and making the game work well on both, yet very different, platforms easily came top of the hassle list."

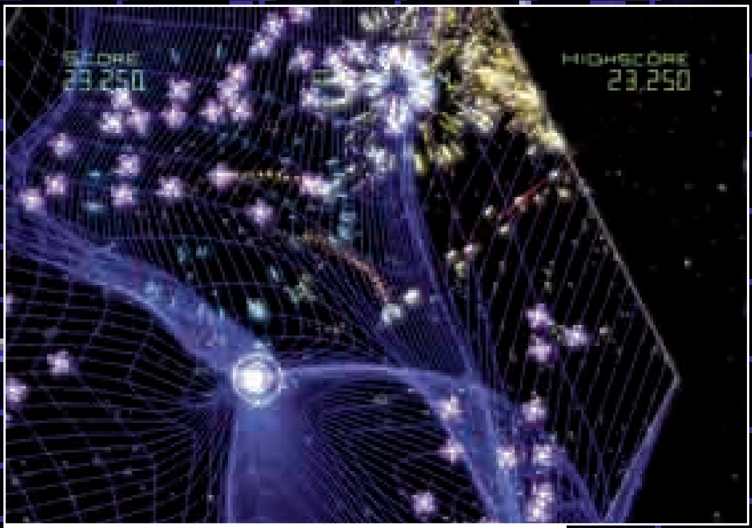


» If you're not interested in using the face buttons to control your ship's fire, you can direct it with the stylus on the bottom screen.

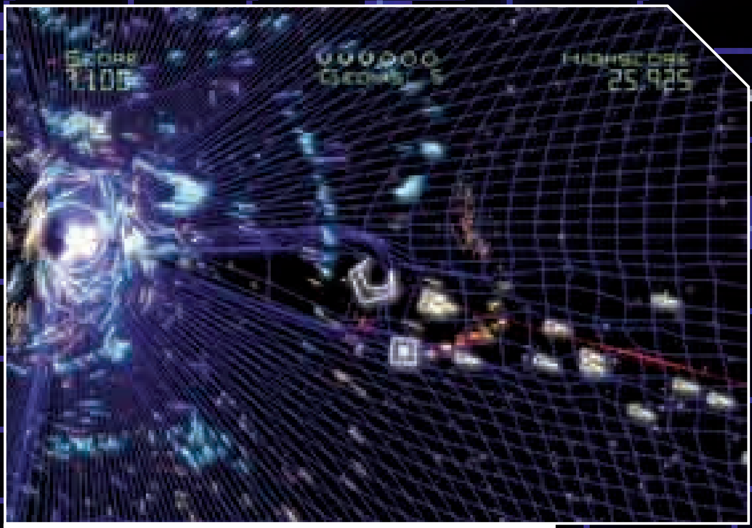
IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** VIVENDI/SIERRA
» **DEVELOPER:** KUJU
» **RELEASED:** 2008
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** Wii
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £24.99



» [Wii] It might not look as spectacular as the 360's of *Retro Evolved*, but *Galaxies* is still pretty.



» [Wii] Get too close to that vortex on the right and you'll find yourself in all sorts of trouble.

Anyone who's ever played a *Geometry Wars* title will immediately know that they use the same control mechanics – one stick for movement, the other for firing – that worked so well with Eugene Jarvis's *Robotron: 2084*. While the series is also famed for its brilliantly gaudy high-definition look that would have been impossible to create on the 480p Wii and a simple handheld like the DS. Of course, then there's the fact that while both would be programmed simultaneously, their distinct control methods – the DS can use a combination of face button and stylus control, while the Wii utilises the Remote and Nunchuk – meant that putting the titles together would be a very different proposition. But surely one system was easier to program than the other?

"I don't think there was an 'easy' one as such," Carpenter continues. "Both systems had their idiosyncrasies. Just simply trying to achieve the 'same' game, that everyone had been used to previously on the higher-spec Xbox 360, wasn't easy by any means. *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* was created as a parallel development on both systems, so the toughest bit was making sure that every process – authoring battles, enemy behaviour, scoring, interface structure, visuals – worked correctly and with ease every time you loaded it up."

Perhaps the biggest obstacle that *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* would face was its actual price. With the previous games being given away free or purchasable for a tiny amount on Xbox Live it was going to be quite a challenge selling to Nintendo owners, especially as WiiWare (a concept similar to Xbox Live Arcade) is just around the corner.

"We were only too aware of the 'Lol… But that's only £3.50 on Live,' thought process," recalls Carpenter. "No one has ever attempted to bring a Live downloadable product to a console before, and certainly not one that people have such a warm fuzzy feeling about. But it's simply not a case of the same eggs in the box. *Retro Evolved* isn't the same as *Galaxies* at all. It's like saying I feel conned by buying *Guitar Hero III* because I own a pre-owned version of *Guitar Hero*. That simply doesn't make sense. The same great gameplay can carry on and be improved upon in later iterations that people will still pay an acceptable price for. We

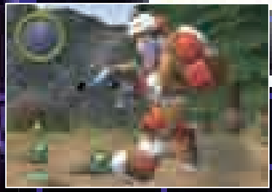
> "WHAT STARTED OUT AS BEING A 'RETRO EVOLVED WITH BELLS ON' CONCEPT, BECAME SOMETHING MUCH LARGER" ROGER CARPENTER ON GALAXIES' CREATION

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

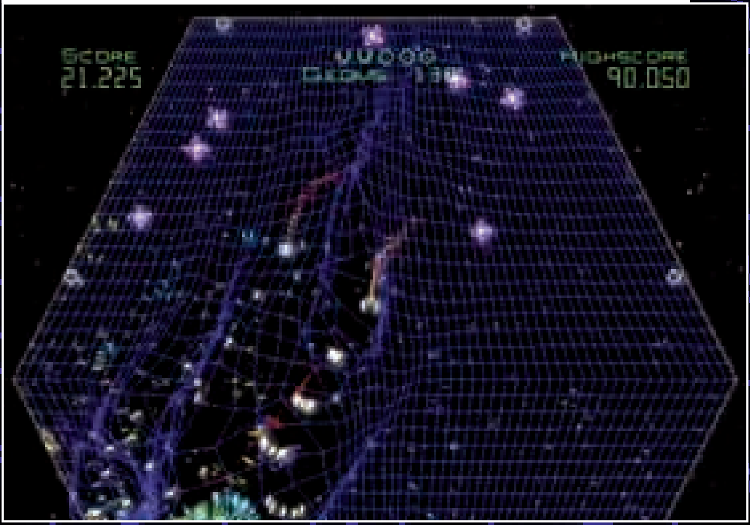
BATTALION WARS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: GAMECUBE
YEAR: 2005

CRUSH
SYSTEM: PSP
YEAR: 2007

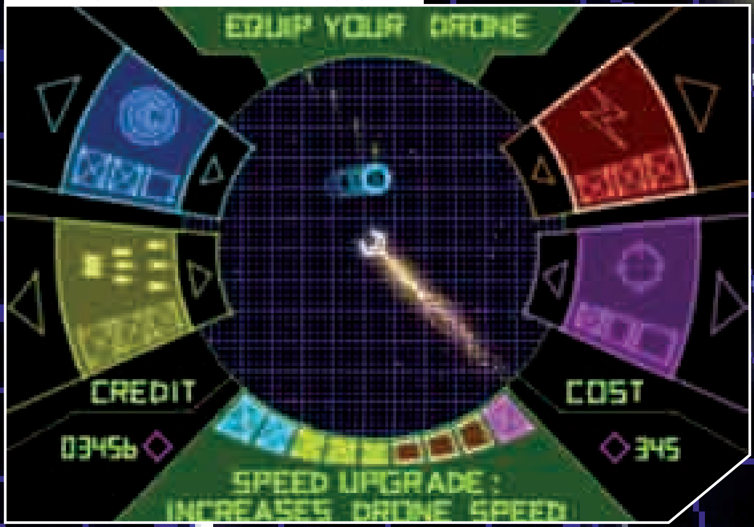
BATTALION WARS 2
SYSTEM: Wii
YEAR: 2007



» [Wii] The rectangular grids of the original games now take on different shapes and can drastically alter gameplay.



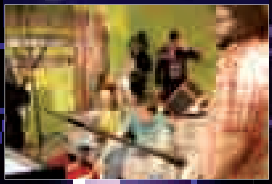
» [Wii] An early mock-up of how the drone screen was going to look.



GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

"IT'S ALL IN THE REFLEXES..."

While *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* works extremely well with the classic controller, most Wii owners won't necessarily have access to it, so Kuju had to come up with a control system that was just as easy to use. We're huge fans of the Classic Controller, but Carpenter isn't so sure it was the right thing to include. "The Classic Controller was only added late into the development and, in some ways, its inclusion has potentially created a rod for the game's back," he explains. "A lot of players who have experience with the Xbox 360 game struggle to unlearn those control techniques. So it's obvious that the Classic Controller offers more pick-up-and-play for players that have learned their skills there. My advice is to persevere and you'll get it. Everyone behind the game stands by the belief that the Wii Remote and Nunchuk is a superior control method. It's very different to a lot of arm-waving Wii games, but it's so precise and rapid when you get into the zone – pro players even switch off all the guides. Those fresh to the game, those who know no different, get along just fine with it. We knew it would be controversial. Perhaps with hindsight the only regret is not implementing the tutorial that we originally planned."



knew we could get over the pricing stigma. There are 64 battles, multiplayer, new gameplay, progressive features, Wii/DS connectivity… We were never conservative with the specification that we set ourselves. Some reviews have even said it's too big… Essentially we knew that something that fostered such a 'just one more game' principle could comfortably be made into something bigger. If we offered only a few new battles and not a lot else, then I'd get the point about pricing."

As Carpenter points out, *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* certainly offers good value for money, as it boasts plenty of new features that have never been seen in the series before. The main difference is that rather than taking place on a simple grid, the action now spans galaxies, with each system featuring a set amount of planets and in turn their own unique grids. Each planet has three medals to collect – bronze, silver and gold – that can only be earned by achieving specific scores. Add in the fact that certain planets will give you penalties like a set amount of lives or no smart bombs, as you soon begin to realise that it's a vastly different beast to what originally appeared bundled with *Project Gotham Racing 2*.

"Our main reason for the different grids is because it fundamentally changes how everything plays," explains Carpenter when we ask him about the new planet layouts. "It's the same for any game. You change the game space and the experience alters accordingly. Size and shape directly affect how each and every enemy behaves and how gamers react to the challenges presented to them. We also used the colour and shape of the grids to denote the style of battle you were about to enter."

Other new additions to *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* include a new drone ship, Geoms, which are left behind by destroyed foes and several new enemies, each with their own unique and varied attack patterns.



» A small selection of *Galaxies'* enemies.

The Geoms are rather interesting because their addition in *Galaxies* serves two purposes. One is to act as a score multiplier – up to a maximum of 150 – which not only acts as your key to landing huge scores, but also presents some excellent 'risk and reward' styled gameplay, while the other is to act as currency, which in turn unlocks anything from galaxies, to planets, to new abilities for your drone.

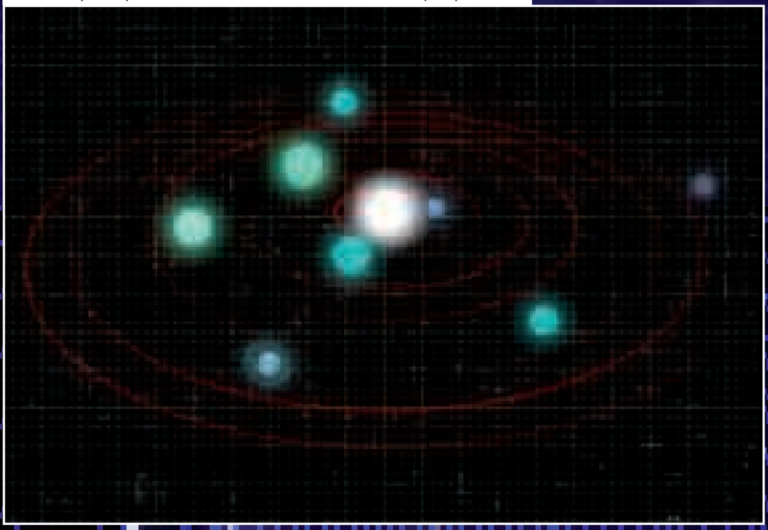
The drone itself is a brilliant addition to the series and so crucial to the gameplay that you'll find yourself wondering just how you ever played a *Geometry Wars* game without it. Starting off as a simple attack ship, you can gradually unlock a variety of distinct attributes for it that will allow it to form a variety of different functions. Continual use of a specific drone will also increase its intelligence and even change the ship's weaponry, so continual experimentation is always the key, as you'll discover that certain drone behaviours are often suited to a specific planet.

"It was recognised early on that the game needed something to bind progression, a system of reward and development to carry the player through the battles," begins Carpenter when we asked about the origins of the drone ship. "Its usage also allowed us to develop battle scenarios that would have been devoid of fun if the player didn't have a levelling drone fighting alongside them. It added a definite

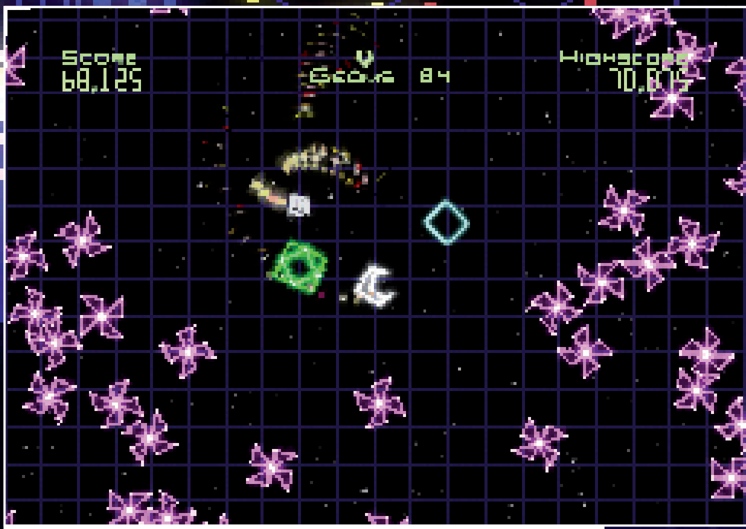
"WE KNEW SOMETHING THAT HAD SUCH A 'JUST ONE MORE GAME' PRINCIPLE COULD EASILY BE MADE INTO SOMETHING BIGGER" ROGER ON EXPANDING THE SERIES



» The *Galaxies* team find the time to pose for a quick picture. Shouldn't you have games you should be working on?



» [Wii] Many of the planets in *Galaxies* are locked, so be sure to collect plenty of Geoms.



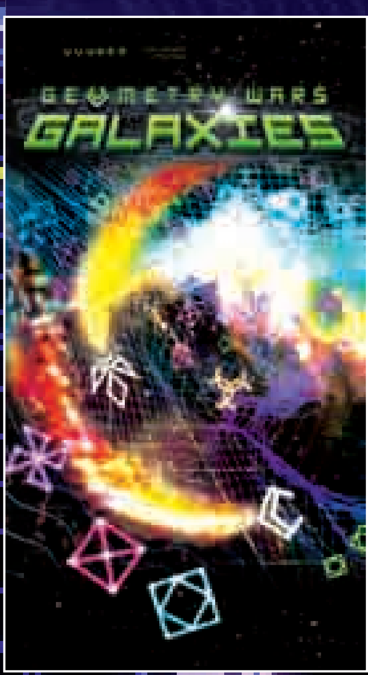
» [DS] It's a little rougher looking that its Wii counterpart, but the DS version is still great fun to play.



» [Wii] There are plenty of planets to unlock so be sure to collect lots of Geoms.

tactical choice to the gameplay as well. It's very satisfying to hear that players are already forming an attachment to their little companion square."

While the drone is likely to bring a big smile to the faces of experienced veterans of the *Geometry Wars* franchise, the devious new enemies that Kuju has included are bound to cause many sleepless nights and lots of moments of frustration. In total, 14 new enemies join the ten from the previous iterations of the game, and many of them are extremely devious to fight against. Mine Layers fill the screen with massive amounts of mines (you only have a few moments to pass them before they trigger off huge chain reactions), while Generators simply churn out insane amounts of enemies.



"There were a lot of enemy ideas on paper," continues Carpenter. "Some went hand in hand with battle ideas, some were nasty, some weren't. Most of the new ones that you see in game have been through many iterations to make them actually work. It's the way *Geometry Wars* gameplay has always been built. Every battle scenario depends on the right mix and style of enemy to ace the fun factor. It's all built very iteratively. There were a few that never got further than paper and some that got into code but didn't work, but that's the way it goes."

"IT DELIVERS FUN AND ADDICTIVE GAMEPLAY ACROSS ALL AGES AND SKILL LEVELS" ROGER CARPENTER ON GEOMETRY WARS' MASS APPEAL

For all of its new additions and game mechanics, the *Geometry Wars* series has always been about attaining the highest score possible, and it's a task that *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* really does perform admirably. While both the Wii and DS are unable to re-create the Xbox 360's unique achievement system, Kuju added a selection of medals that were awarded once specific scores had been reached, meaning that there was always an underlying incentive to go back to a planet.

"We had always wanted there to be a reward and measuring system aside from the drive of a high score," admits Carpenter about the inclusion of *Galaxies*' medal system. "With *Retro Evolved* we were aware that some people struggled to get 100K plus, some struggled to get to 500K plus and some struggled to get to 1 million plus. So the medal system was partly to match gameplay against those skill levels. We also made sure that obtaining, or not obtaining, medals didn't massively destroy a player's chance of experiencing the entire game. They're a fun additional layer rather than an essential factor to play."

With *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* now available (check out our review on page 93), you can see for yourself if all the extra work was worth it. We personally feel it's an excellent addition to the popular franchise, and certainly wouldn't mind seeing a high-definition version appear on either Xbox Live Arcade or PSN at some time in the near future.

"That's totally up to Bizarre Creations," admits Carpenter. "They wanted the *Galaxies* game to be exclusive to Nintendo platforms, that's how far Sierra's licence extends. They're the IP holders, so the next steps are up to them. I'm sure *Galaxies* has proven that it's got more legs, so anything is possible."

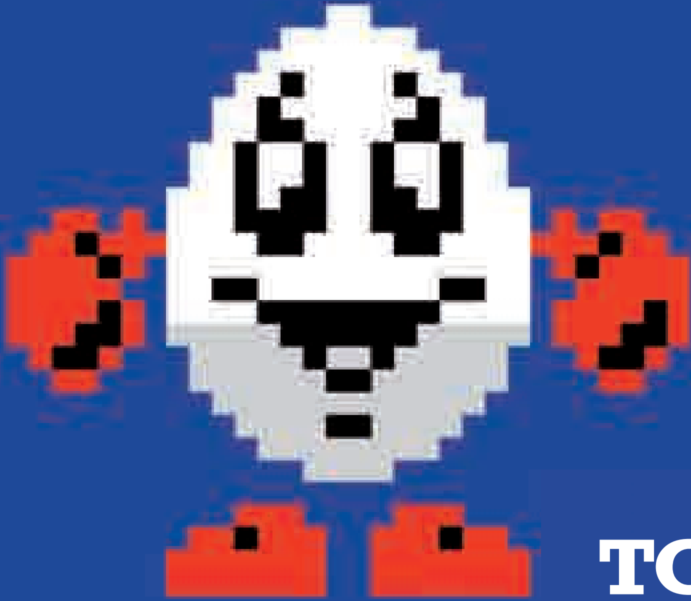
While the series has only appeared on current-gen systems, there's no denying that it's an old-school blaster at heart, and that, admits Carpenter is part of the franchise's appeal.

"It's all down to its classic arcade purity and simplicity," he finishes. "It delivers fun and addictive gameplay across all ages and skill levels. It's almost the antidote to all the theatrical blockbuster gameplay experiences out there. Big games come and go, but a lot of gamers I know still play *Geometry Wars* in one flavour or another."

HELPFUL HANDS

Although *Galaxies* is a Kuju release, Bizarre Creations was still on hand to ensure the franchise made the transition to the Nintendo consoles as smoothly as possible. " The whole thing started out when David Hampson started to port the game onto the Gp2x for a bit of fun," recalls Bizarre's Craig Howard. "It wasn't long after this that Stephen Cakebread (*Geometry Wars*' creator who's picutred below) looked at the possibility of putting *Geometry Wars* on the Wii, he soon had it running and started to experiment with all of the potential controls configurations that the game could have. Not to be left out Ben Ward decided to get the game running on the Nintendo DS. It wasn't long before these versions were generating a lot of positive buzz around the Bizarre studio! While a couple of publishers approached us with the proposition of publishing *Geometry Wars Retro Evolved*, in the end it was decided that Vivendi were the guys and gals who had the capacity and skill to do the game justice."







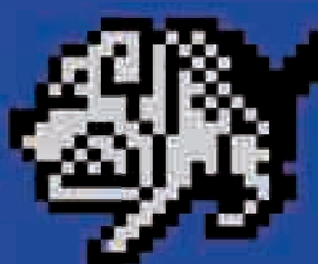
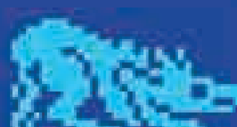

TOP 25 Spectrum games OF ALL TIME



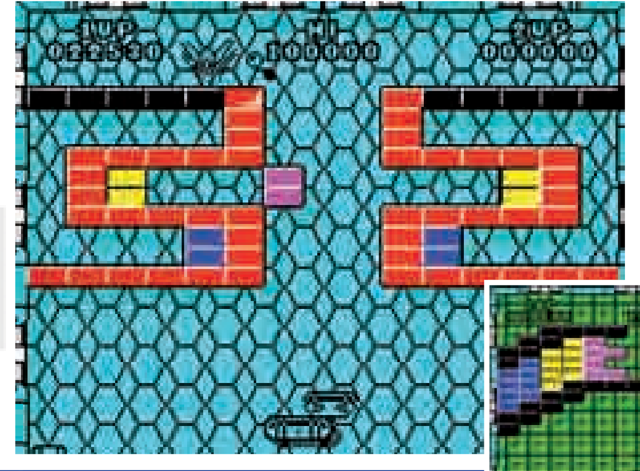

JUST BECAUSE THEY'RE AMSTRAD BOYS DOESN'T MEAN THAT STUART AND DARRAN DON'T KNOW HOW TO LOVE ITS LESSER 8-BIT RIVALS*. SO JOIN THEM AS THEY FIDDLE WITH THEIR KEMPSTON INTERFACES, WAGGLE THEIR QUICKSHOTS AND LOVINGLY LOOK BACK AT SOME OF THE SPECTRUM'S GREATEST HITS

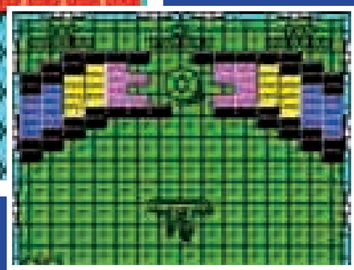
*We are joking, of course

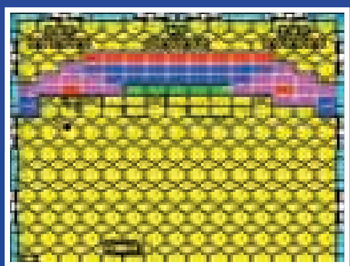


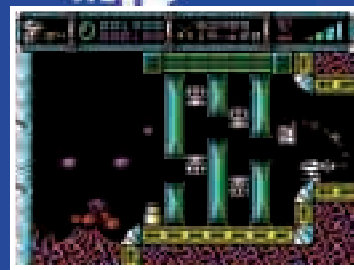















Batty

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** Hit Pak

25

***Arkanoid* may have received an extremely polished conversion on the humble ZX Spectrum, but it couldn't compete with this monumental epic from Hit Pak.**

Each level has been beautifully constructed, there are huge amounts of power-ups that include a bog-standard laser, your typical extender and a handy level warp, and there are also a variety of different options, including a wonderful co-op mode that effectively splits the bottom of the screen into two parts. You monitor one side of the screen, while a friend manages the other.

Add in some fiendishly well-put-together levels, some bold, cartoon-like visuals and some hellishly addictive gameplay and the end result is one of the best *Breakout* clones of all time. The fact that it was initially given away for free with *Your Sinclair* is absolutely staggering.

Cybernoid

■ **Year:** 1988

■ **Publisher:** Hewson Consultants

24

Raffaele Cecco's wonderful *Cybernoid* harks back to the good old days when game testing was solely the responsibility of the developer, shoot-'em-ups were one of the most popular genres around and games required pixel-perfect timing in order to proceed.

Cybernoid is possibly the toughest game in our top 25. It requires insane levels of concentration, dextrous keyboard and joystick skills and the patience of a saint. Despite this, *Cybernoid* always pulls us back for one more go and remains so polished you can almost see your face in it. What makes it so essential is its jaw-droppingly vibrant visuals, intricately designed levels and spot-on controls (it has the sort of pixel-perfect precision normally seen in platformers). It's not for everyone, but it's an experience that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.

Nebulus

■ **Year:** 1988

■ **Publisher:** Hewson Consultants

23

There's a veritable deluge of brilliant platformers and puzzle games available on the ZX Spectrum, but very rarely are these two rather distinct genres successfully combined.

Nebulus – which is also known as *Tower Toppler* or *Castelian* depending on whereabouts you live – is a wonderful example of this combination of genres and sees you guiding a cute bipedal alien named Pogo to the top of several towers. Once at the top, these towers must then be detonated.

Working against a tight time limit, you're required to use lifts and handy doorways to zip back and forth through the cleverly rotating towers – a graphical feat that still manages to impress today – in order to avoid the tower's numerous enemies. As challenging to play as it is gorgeous to look at.

Fantasy World Dizzy

■ **Year:** 1989

■ **Publisher:** Codemasters

22

Ever since Philip and Andrew Oliver's ovoid creation appeared in the *Ultimate Cartoon Adventure* we've always had a soft spot for Dizzy. *Fantasy World Dizzy* is not only Dizzy's greatest 8-bit adventure, it's also the very last 8-bit *Dizzy* adventure from the Oliver twins – development duties for the game's sequels were handed over to Big Red Software.

The brothers certainly left on a high though. *Fantasy World Dizzy* is a huge, beautifully crafted adventure that features well-thought-out, and far better-balanced, puzzles, a new *Magic Knight*-style interface, the introduction of the Yolkfolk and a surprising amount of humour.

You may not be able to make an omelette without breaking a few eggs, but by not damaging their mascot the Oliver twins certainly proved that it was entirely possible to create an excellent arcade adventure.

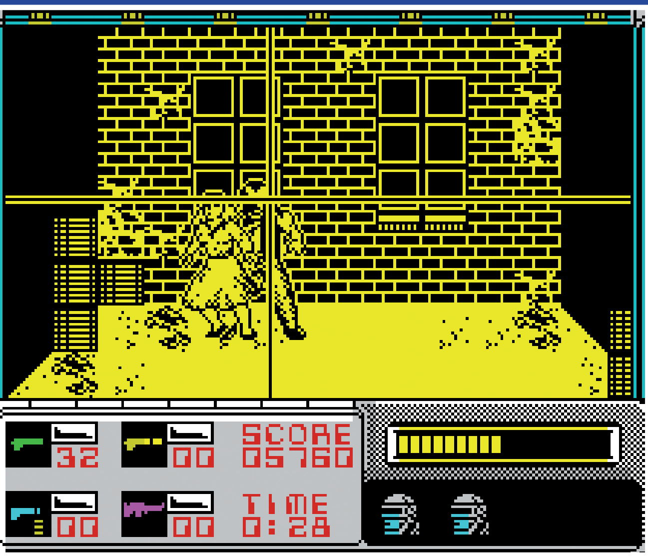




"CYBERNOID IS POSSIBLY THE TOUGHEST GAME IN OUR LIST, REQUIRING INSANE CONCENTRATION, DEXTROUS JOYSTICK SKILLS AND THE PATIENCE OF A SAINT"

TOP 25 spectrum games OF ALL TIME





RoboCop

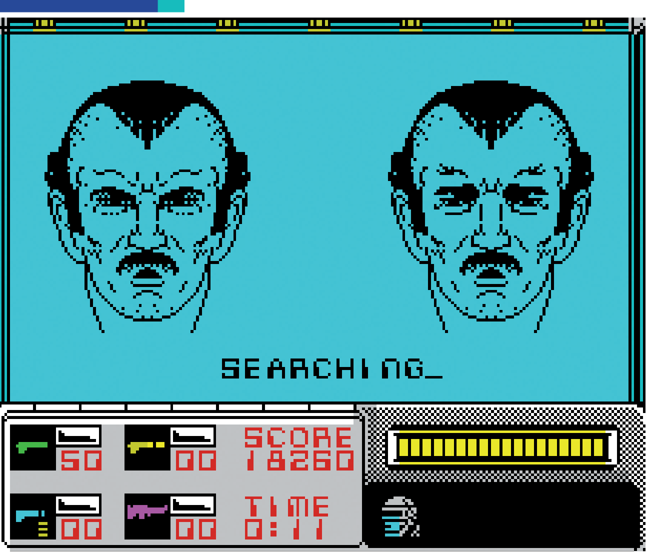
■ **Year:** 1989

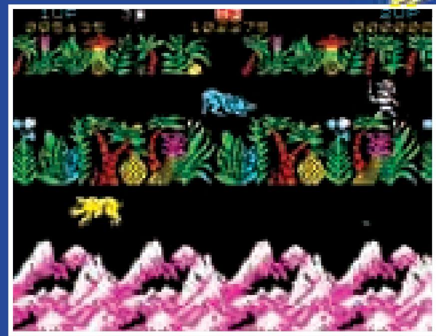
■ **Publisher:** Ocean

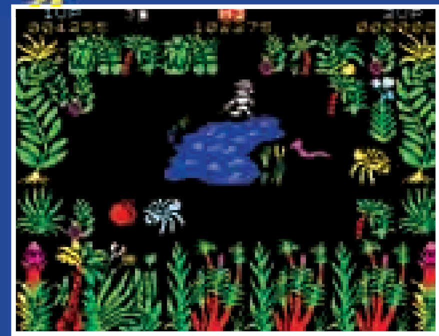
21 **After churning out cheap-and-cheerful licensed dross like *Transformers, Knight Rider* and *Highlander,* Ocean turned a corner and began releasing quality movie tie-ins.**

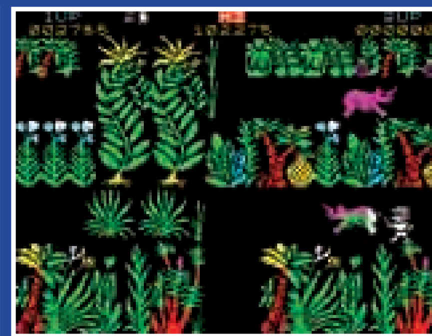
RoboCop remains one of the best examples, and by using the template of the incoming Data East blaster and juxtaposing the action with clever mini-games, such as rescuing hostages and putting face IDs together, Ocean created a tie-in that few other developers (Ocean included) were able to improve upon.

The mostly monochrome visuals do a great job of capturing the spirit of the original film, and while the action is a little more pedestrian than we remember, it nevertheless remains great fun to play. Film and TV licences were ten a penny on the 8-bit computers and it's a testament to both Ocean's development skills and *RoboCop*'s enjoyable gameplay that it's the only example to make our list.









Sabre Wulf

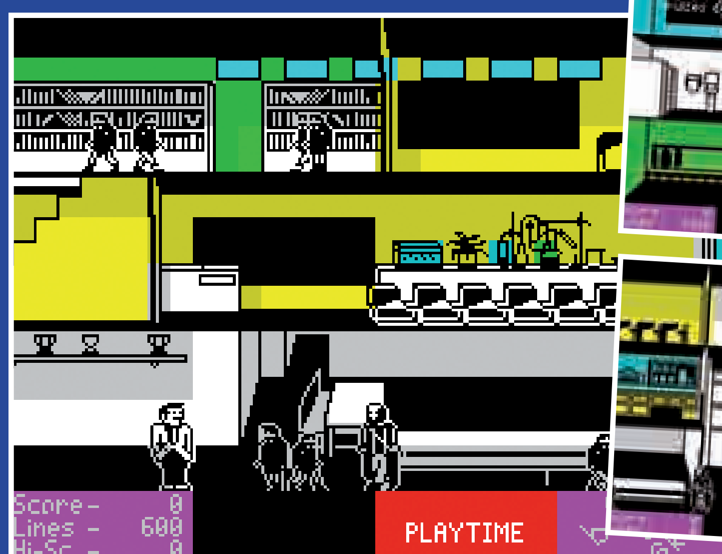
■ **Year:** 1984

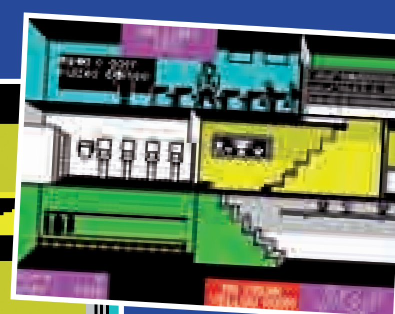
■ **Publisher:** Ultimate: Play the Game

20 **We've been playing Ultimate's brilliant *Sabre Wulf* for 24 years now and we still haven't been able to collect all four pieces of that sodding amulet. Not to worry, though, it simply allows us to appreciate what a staggering game Sabreman's first outing actually is.**

Taking place over an absolutely humongous 256 screens, you're required to do nothing more than explore the vast and varied jungle to recover the four aforementioned missing pieces of a precious amulet. Of course, as you would probably expect, this is much easier said than done, and Sabreman has to contend with some rather angry natives, the titular Sabre Wulf and all manner of horrible jungle critters before he's able to complete his lofty goal.

With its gorgeous visuals, fast-paced gameplay and massive environment, *Sabre Wulf* is typical of the care and attention to detail that the Stamper brothers put into all of their early Spectrum games, so don't be too surprised if you see a few more Ultimate games before our top 25 Spectrum games feature is finally complete.







Back To Skool

■ **Year:** 1985

■ **Publisher:** Microsphere

19 **After wowing Spectrum owners with the brilliant *Skool Daze,* David Reidy and Keith Warrington returned a year later with a sequel that was even more ambitious.**

You were once again cast in the shorts and blazer of the mischievous Erik, but this time he was able to get up to even more mayhem and mischief. A new girl's school increased the playing area. Erik also had access to stink bombs and water pistols as well as his trusty catapult now, while it was even possible for the little scamp to catch mice and frogs (of which the former could be released in the girl's school). Other improvements to the original included the ability to ride a bike and the handy option of opening desks in order to discover what was hiding inside them.

Back To Skool still proved hard going for those used to being hand led through their games, but it still managed a level of interactivity that few other Spectrum titles have ever been able to match.



"BACK TO SKOOL PROVED HARD GOING, BUT IT STILL MANAGED A LEVEL OF INTERACTIVITY THAT FEW OTHER SPECTRUM TITLES HAVE EVER BEEN ABLE TO MATCH"









Ant Attack

■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Publisher:** Quicksilva

18 **Predating *It Came From The Desert* by a good six years, Sandy White's *Ant Attack* remains a game of stark beauty and cunning gameplay. Taking control of either a young girl or a young boy – don't worry they control in exactly the same way – your task is to venture into the abstract walled city of Antescher in search of your missing beau.**

While the first level is relatively easy – a quick hop, step and a jump over the wall and you're practically done – later stages are anything but, and it's here where White's true genius becomes apparent. Initially coming across as little more than a pile of hastily assembled Lego blocks, the city of Antescher soon reveals itself to be a deadly maze, where ants can jump out at you at any time.

Granted, you've got 20 grenades to take them on with, but the claustrophobia quickly sets in, and later levels became a frightening race against time as your ragged nerves deal with five or six ants, a missing loved one and a constantly ticking timer. Truly terrifying.



The Lords Of Midnight

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** Beyond Software

17 **You'll never forget the first time you played Mike Singleton's *The Lords Of Midnight*. With its lavish packaging, accompanying overlay card and distinct gameplay, it proved that there was more to the Spectrum than simple platformers and arcade conversions, and it remains a very atmospheric title without equal.**

What impresses most about *The Lords Of Midnight* is its flexibility. While the main objective is to lead your four adventurers on a quest to destroy the fabled Ice Crown, it's possible to forget the task completely and just concentrate on amassing a huge army. If that doesn't take your fancy you can just as easily combine the two into an epic adventure that few other 8-bit games could match.

Massive in scale – the pseudo-3D graphics display over 31,000 different views – and rich in atmosphere, *The Lords Of Midnight* is a Spectrum title that everyone should experience. If you're familiar with it, go back and play through it again. A true classic.







Turbo Esprit

■ **Year:** 1986

■ **Publisher:** Durrell

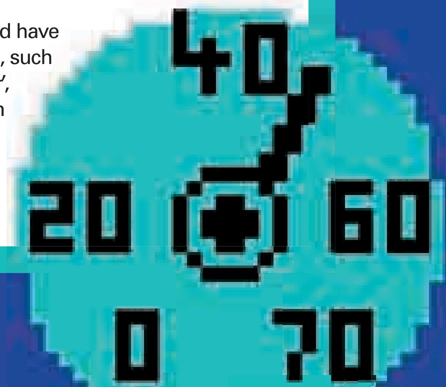
16 ***Turbo Esprit*, not to be confused with the Gremlin game with a very similar name, is a criminally great sandbox game from the makers of *Harrier Attack*.**

This sublime little gem had you taking to the mean streets of Wellington, Gamesborough, Romford and Minster and indulging in a spot of covert stakeout-type drug busting.

Boasting bustling cities crammed with Durell's signature ant-looking denizens, staggering AI and a novel feeling of freedom, *Turbo Esprit* would later go on to become a major influence on Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto* series.

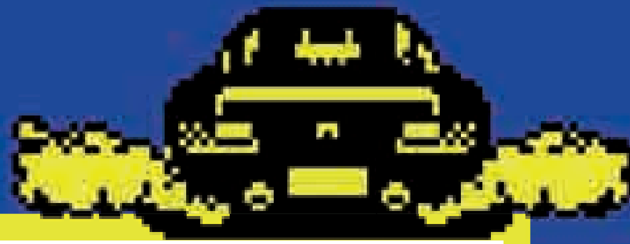
And while the game probably would have benefited from a slightly punchier title, such as '*Turbo Elite Cokehead Apprehender*', playing the game was still like being in your own episode of *Miami Vice*.

Quite simply there's nothing quite like it on the Speccy and so, for that reason, it's in.





TOP 25 spectrum games OF ALL TIME





Jet Set Willy

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** Software Projects

15

We've all been there, the morning after the night before. In this case, a house party, probably the outcome of a careless exchange on a popular friendship website, has meant that Willy's mansion, after being packed to the rafters with beer guzzlers and winos, has now been alcoholically decimated.

And to make matters worse for Willy, his lardy housekeeper has put her stomping foot down and is preventing poor Willy from going to bed, recharging the old batteries and promising to do something about the mess in the morning.

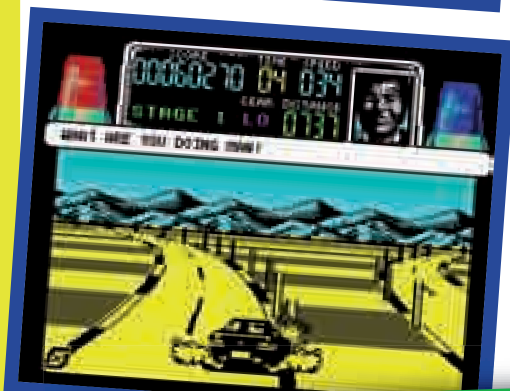
Matthew Smith's second house of pain was a sublime and simple platforming jaunt that built on the brilliance of *Manic Miner*.

Jet Set Willy was released into a swathe of high expectancy, both by gamers, preying that it would be as good, if not better, than the original, and by its publisher, who was hoping to make a shed load of cash – which was the reason that the game came packed with an annoying copy protection card.

Jet Set Willy's quirky and colourful palette, warped imagery and surrealist humour captured perfectly the irreverence of videogames of the time. And as it was built with the Spectrum in mind, it is widely considered to house the finest version of the game.







Chase HQ

■ **Year:** 1988

■ **Publisher:** Taito

14

Taito's wonderful pursuit racer still gets a lot of play in the Retro Gamer offices. While we would lovingly hand the best conversion accolade to the Amstrad for its colourful finesse, the Spectrum's offering does feel fractionally more fluid, especially when you're belting across *Chase HQ*'s quasi-3D tarmac, screaming, "Let's go Mr Driver!"

The Speccy has been blessed with some truly brilliant racing games in its lifetime, but *Chase HQ* showcases a real eye for detail and technical ability from Ocean. An almost impractical chasm sat between the arcade machine and the ZX Spectrum, and yet, somehow, Ocean managed to rev the Porsche 928 to pretty much clunking-out point before flicking a nitro switch and jumping that gorge magnificently.

Chase HQ was blessed with an almost perfect home arcade port – easily up there with the likes of *Sega Rally* and *Buggy Boy*. It is the quintessential Spectrum racing game and was massively popular with Speccy owners back in the game's heyday… so popular, in fact, that *Your Sinclair* readers went on to vote it the best Spectrum game of all time.

"JET SET WILLY'S QUIRKY AND COLOURFUL PALETTE, WARPED IMAGERY AND HUMOUR CAPTURED THE IRREVERENCE OF VIDEOGAMES OF THE TIME"

Chuckie Egg

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** A&F Software

13

Nigel Alderton's classic platformer is so ingrained in the minds of BBC owners that it's easy to forget it started off life as a Spectrum title (see RG 40 for details). Based on some of Alderton's favourite coin-ops, such as *Donkey Kong* and *Space Panic*, *Chuckie Egg* is an insanely fast platformer that sees hero Hen House Harry going up and down ladders and leaping across platforms in search of eggs, while avoiding the angry hens.

Unlike other platformers of the time, which were more methodical and slower-paced, '*Eggy Kong*' (as it was originally known) dashed along at a cracking pace and really felt like it had escaped from your local arcade. It may have only had eight levels, but they were fiendishly designed and it wasn't until several loops had passed and the huge caged duck had been released that you began to appreciate just how expertly crafted they were.

It's not one of the Spectrum's most original platformers, but there's no denying that it's one of the most polished. A classic in every sense.















Stop The Express

■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Publisher:** Sinclair Research Ltd

12

If we're honest, 12th seems a little meagre for this sublime Hudson title, but the reasoning is this: there really is an abundance of top-notch games on the Spectrum.

Chunky arcade-style graphics, quirky premise and compulsive playability sum up all the factors that make a classic retro game, and *Stop The Express* succeeds in ticking all those boxes.

Playing a shaggy-haired blonde chap in green pyjamas, it was your job to stop a train by fighting your way from one end to the other. Trying to put a leaf on your track were 'train gangsters' who could be felled by grabbing and kicking 'snake birds' at them. Brilliant.

After you'd traversed the first ten carriages from the rooftops, the game put you inside the train, where you had to avoid more dagger throwers and the ectoplasm of trundling ghosts.

Stop The Express is a simple and beautiful Speccy game. We believe a "Congraturation! You sucsess!" is firmly in order here.



Starquake

■ **Year:** 1985

■ **Publisher:** Bubble Bus

10

Stephen Crow's *Starquake* may share many similarities with a typical Ultimate release – brilliantly drawn visuals, engaging gameplay, strong main character – but extended play soon reveals it to be something quite different.

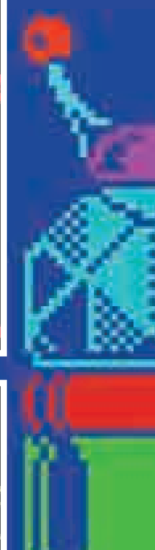
Essentially a cross between a shoot-'em-up, platformer and an adventure game, *Starquake* is a fun title that casts you in the form of BLOB (Bio-Logically Operated Being) who must find the missing parts of his crashed spaceship.

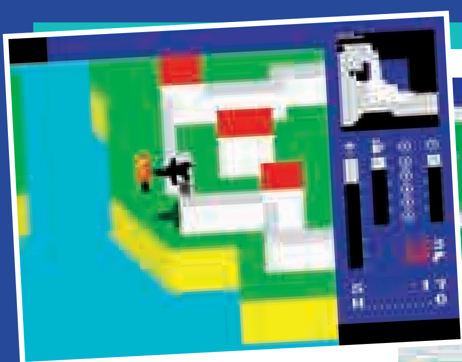
Fortunately, in order to make traversing the huge – 512 screens – planet easier, BLOB has a number of handy abilities. As well as being incredibly fast – the game pelts along at a cracking pace – he can create platforms, which last for a limited time, to reach out of the way areas, or he can simply jump on to a nearby hoverboard (although this makes it impossible for him to pick up items). There are even handy teleports to use, therefore making the gigantic world far more manageable.

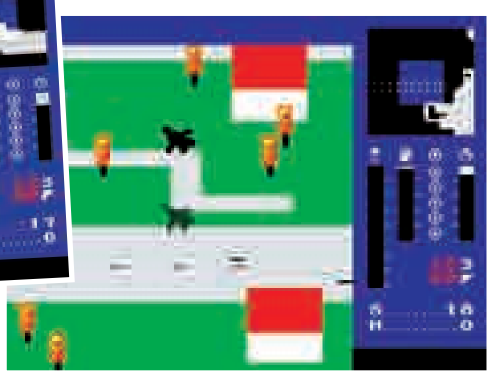
With its beautifully drawn visuals, clever mishmash of genres and addictive gameplay, *Starquake* manages to deliver an experience that's quite unlike any other Spectrum release. Visit the World Of Spectrum website today to discover its magic for yourself.











TLL

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** Vortex Software

11

If you're the sort of Spectrum owner who's constantly hounded by C64 and Amstrad owners, show them Vortex Software's amazing *TLL* and watch them shut up faster than a superglued clam.

Created by Costa '*Deflektor*' Panayi, *Tornado Low Level* (to give it its full title) is an insanely slick looking title that features some of the smoothest and flicker-free scrolling you're ever likely to see on Sir Clive's humble 8-bit.

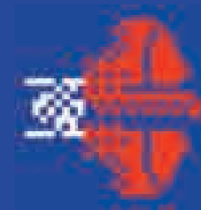
Taking control of a Tornado jet, you're simply required to fly around and participate in strategically placed missile strikes. There are no actual enemies and nothing to shoot at; it's just your fighter, a constantly dropping fuel supply and plenty of hazards – trees, houses, telephone wires – to avoid.

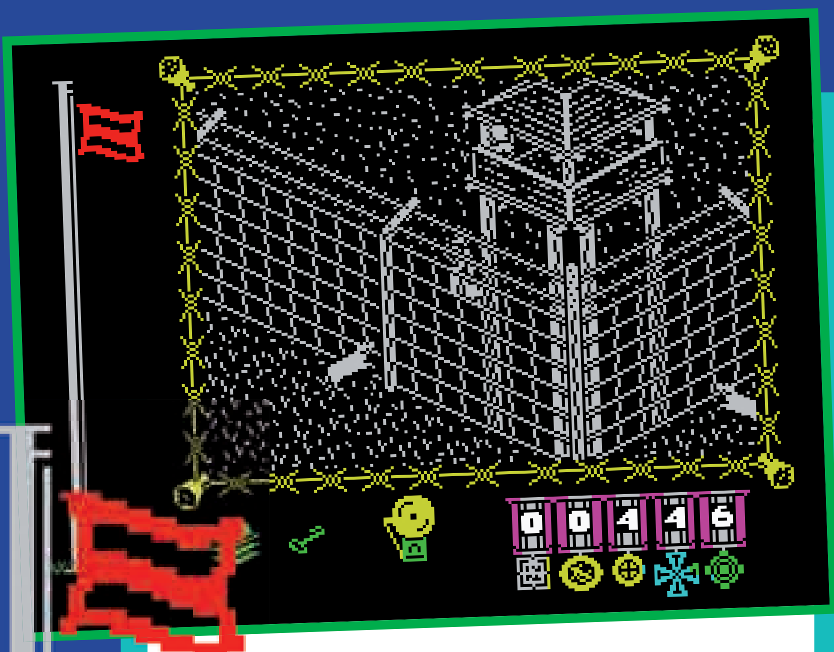
It sounds simple, boring even, but this couldn't be further from the truth. *TLL* requires a cool nerve, insane gameplay skills and a hefty pair of balls – you have to fly dangerously close to the ground to bomb your targets – and is not for the faint-hearted.

Those feeling the need for speed, however, will discover a title that's not only graphically amazing, but, more importantly, has the actual gameplay to back it up. Stunning. Simply stunning.

TOP 25 spectrum games OF ALL TIME







The Great Escape

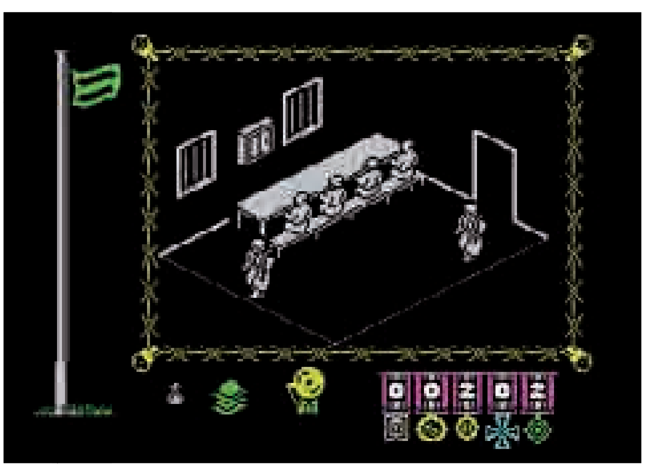
■ **Year:** 1986

■ **Publisher:** Ocean

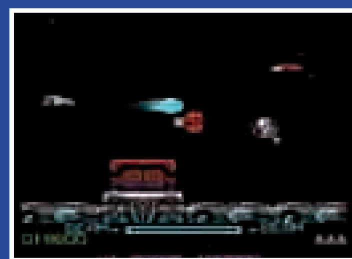
9 **This hazy movie tie-in by Denton Design proved to be a very surprising hit for Ocean when it was released on the Spectrum. *The Great Escape* plonked the player into a peculiar monochrome ritual of breakfast, roll calls and wily absconding.**

It was a brilliantly designed game that brimmed with a stellar cast of innovative ideas – it offered various different escape routes from the camp and your hero would automatically adhere to the camp's routines if you left him to his own devices for too long. *The Great Escape* proved to be a trailblazing Spectrum classic that benefited from the computer's small colour palette by coating the game in a tense cheer-destroying bleakness.

It also helped to give movie tie-ins some credibility, dragging the much-reviled genre out of solitary confinement and proving that it could fit in with the rest of the law-abiding game genres that existed at that time.







R-Type

■ **Year:** 1988

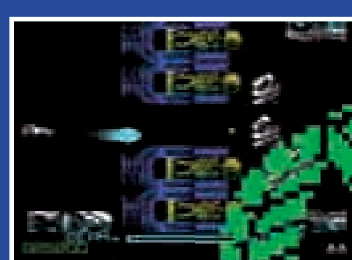
■ **Publisher:** Electric Dreams

8 **It's been 20 years now and we still can't work out how Bob Pape and Mark Jones pulled off this stunning conversion (if you're reading guys, we'd love to hear from you).**

Anyway, *R-Type* on the Spectrum is a thing of beauty and is easily the best arcade conversion to grace the machine. The graphics are incredible, with huge, brightly coloured sprites, very little colour clash, insanely smooth scrolling and amazing looking bosses. Level layout throughout is virtually identical, with many classic scenes from the arcade original being instantly recognisable, making for a wonderfully authentic experience.

It wasn't just *R-Type*'s gob-smacking visuals that impressed, as its gameplay was just as finely honed. The force might not have been as responsive as its arcade parent, but that's our only niggle, everything else – enemy placement, movement and structure – is near identical, meaning that many of the tricks can be pulled off perfectly. An astounding conversion that proved to Amstrad and C64 owners that the Spectrum was still a force to be reckoned with.





Knight Lore

■ **Year:** 1984

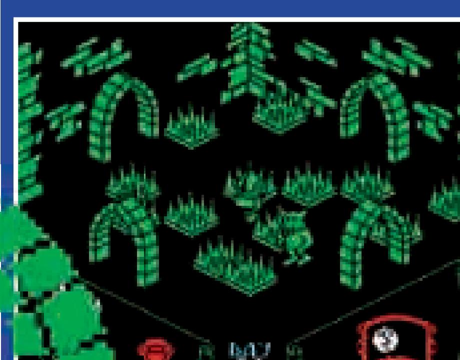
■ **Publisher:** Ultimate

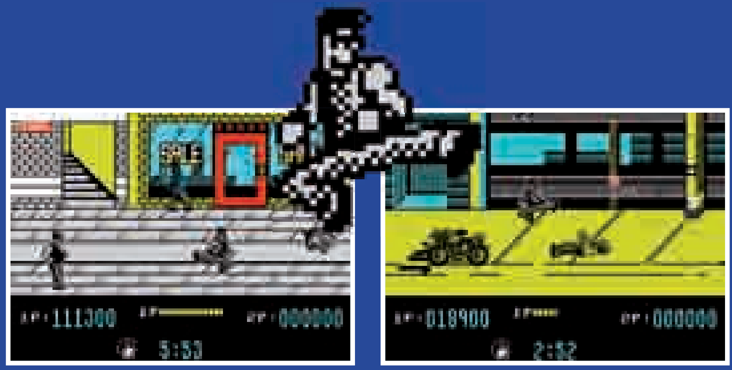
7 **Sabreman returns, but this time he's gone isometric! After wowing gamers with titles such as *Jetpac*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Pssst*, Ultimate ushered in a new era of Spectrum visuals by dressing up Sabreman in some brand new isometric clothing.**

Granted, an isometric Spectrum game was certainly nothing new – take a bow 3D *Ant Attack*. However, Ultimate's new 'Filmation' engine pushed the unique-looking style to previously unseen levels and delivered a title that was both stunning to look at and an absolute joy to play through.

After receiving a wolf bite at the end of *Sabre Wulf*, Sabreman has to explore the enormous castle and create the potion that will help to free him from his lycanthropic curse. Along the way he also has to deal with some incredibly fiendish puzzles that require critical timing, fast reflexes and plenty of skill. Oh, and did we mention that the poor blighter turns into a werewolf every evening?

Constantly imitated (most notably by Ultimate itself), but very rarely bettered, *Knight Lore* is a gloriously fun adventure that not only helped to cement the Stamper brothers as a force to be reckoned with, but also proved that Sir Clive Sinclair's humble 8-bit machine still had the ability to pleasantly surprise.





Target Renegade

■ **Year:** 1988

■ **Publisher:** Imagine

6

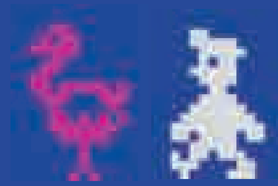
What do you do when you release a hit conversion of a popular arcade game that's never been blessed with a proper sequel? If you're Imagine Software you simply release your own unofficial spin-off that's even better than the arcade original.

With its bold, cartoony visuals, incredibly violent gameplay and frantic two-player action, Imagine's *Target Renegade* instantly captured the hearts of those arcade gamers who were obsessed with Technos' *Double Dragon* and delivered a home experience that no other fighter of the time was able to match.

Never mind that the plot's flimsier than a house of cards and has the disgraced gangs trying to redeem their honour by killing the renegade and his identical twin brother – *Target Renegade* was all about the action and Imagine did not disappoint. Punches, vicious knees to the groin and flying kicks were just a few of the moves the brothers had access to, while weapons like hammers, chains and even pool cues could be used to dish out additional hurt to your hapless foes. Excellent stuff.







Manic Miner

■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Publisher:** Bug-Byte

5

For further insight into the nutty world of *Manic Miner* head over to page 22 and read our in-depth 'Making of'. *Manic Miner* created many imitators, but none quite reached the heights of the original. It is the Spectrum's best platformer and a stunning example of the genre.

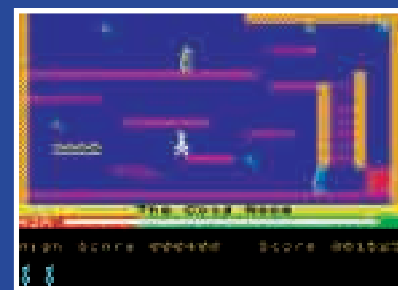
Despite being only 20 screens long – although it would take you some time to finish – *Manic Miner* proved to be the crowning jewel of Smith's short-lived career and delivered an experience that, if we're truly honest, Smith never had a fair chance of succeeding. Indeed, it's very much platform perfection.

Every enemy is well placed, the structure of each platform feels almost organic, while the pixel-perfect jumping will never – for the most part – test your patience. With its jaunty opening, boot-stomping ending and bizarre enemies, Smith's game proved to be a masterpiece that, 25 years later, still manages to impress.

An utterly ingenious piece of programming that shows just how far you can go with sheer talent and a very healthy imagination.







Elite

■ **Year:** 1985

■ **Publisher:** Firebird Software

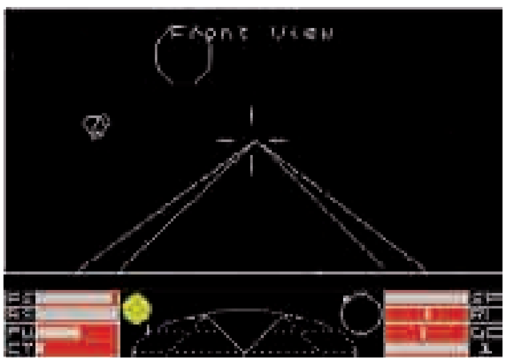
4

We came extremely close to leaving *Elite* out of our top 25 list altogether, mainly due to its heavy association with the BBC and last month's extremely in-depth and exhaustive feature. However, after giving it a little bit of thought, we suddenly realised that there's no other Spectrum game out there that offers the same kind of unique experience as *Elite*.

With Firebird owning the rights to a glut of new systems and David Braben and Ian Bell busy at work on other conversions, it was left to Torus to handle the highly anticipated Spectrum conversion. Fortunately though, the end result was a highly accurate re-creation of the original BBC release that not only offered the same sense of wonder and astonishment that the BBC and Acorn outings had delivered a year earlier, but even added a few original touches of its own.

Armed with nothing more than a Cobra Mk III and 100 credits, the universe of *Elite* is literally your oyster and you're given a real sense of freedom that is incomparable in other Spectrum releases. It might be a little more sluggish when compared to its BBC counterpart, but the same gripping and absorbing gameplay remained, and Torus even had the foresight to include several new missions that had never actually appeared in the BBC and Acorn originals. Ultimately though, for all its cosmetic changes, this was *Elite* through and through and it instantly received rave reviews from popular magazines such as *Crash* and *Sinclair User*.

With its sandbox gameplay, moral dilemmas – did you always play as the good guy, or occasionally go after some easy bounties? – and beautiful – if rather stark – wireframe visuals, *Elite* remains a true classic that no self-respecting gamer, Spectrum or otherwise, should go without experiencing at least once in their lives.





"R-TYPE ON THE SPECTRUM IS A THING OF BEAUTY AND IS EASILY THE BEST ARCADE CONVERSION TO GRACE THE MACHINE"



TOP 25

spectrum games

OF ALL TIME





Chaos

■ **Year:** 1985

■ **Publisher:** Games Workshop

2 **Julian Gollop lent his brain to some of the finest strategy games to appear on the 8-bit micros. His greatest works include: *Laser Squad, Lords Of Chaos,* and the sublime *Rebelstar.***

Set on the planet of Limbo, *Chaos* was a very early and deceptively deep strategy game. If you've ever wondered why Games Workshops still seem to inhabit the high streets, or considered taking that plunge into the 'strat-'o'-fear', then you should really make *Chaos* the next game you boot up and play. But be warned, set aside a quiet afternoon because it's annoyingly addictive.

Beginning with a series of questions to help you create your hero and set you on course for the wonderful world of wizard duelling, the game then gave you the keys to a messy magical melee against up to seven other wizardly foes.

Okay, the graphics looked crude, and it wouldn't do much to impress any of your C64 and CPC chums, but its rudimentary look made getting a head around all the spells and rules of engagement more accessible.

After you had created your wizard, he would be blessed with a random collection of spells to help you vanquish your opponents.

The most innovative feature about *Chaos* was the fact that during play, being that your spells were purposefully temperamental little buggers, there was no guarantee that they would actually work.

The more potent the spell, the higher the risk of seeing it seize up on you. So while the Giant Rats were reliable, trying to persuade your Speccy to let you have access to one of *Chaos*'s bashful Golden Dragons would prove a little trickier.

To improve your odds you could cast some of the smaller spells to influence the laws of the game board and make opting for the stronger enemies less of a gamble, opening up a world of tactical possibilities.



Head Over Heels

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** Ocean

3 **After the arrival of *Knight Lore* in 1984, virtually every videogame publisher began jumping on the isometric bandwagon, desperate to cash in on what was becoming a rapidly popular genre. Despite many fine efforts – the majority of them usually being from Ultimate – none have ever come close to the sheer brilliance of John Ritman's utterly sublime *Head Over Heels*.**

After cutting his isometric teeth on the thoroughly enjoyable *Batman*, Ritman's next project would be far more ambitious and included more devious puzzles, many, many more screens to explore, and, in a twist that was highly original for the time, two distinctive characters for the player to control; each with their own special abilities.

Head was a large-nosed… well, head… with a pair of stubby wings that enabled him to make mighty jumps and also glide for short periods, while Heels was an adorable puppy-like creature whose huge feet allowed him to quickly move through Bernie Drummond's surreal-looking environments. Originally known as 'Foot & Mouth' the duo are not only insanely cute (no easy task when you're dealing with a limited amount of pixels), but instantly recognisable to anyone from the 8-bit era.

Initially trapped in the bowels of Blacktooth Castle, your first task is to actually escape. These early screens are not only filled with some brilliantly conceived puzzles, but also act as the perfect tutorial for both Head and Heels' skills. Of course, once you've struggled through these first 40-odd rooms and managed to escape, your adventure not only truly begins, but Ritman also plays his masterstroke by revealing that the two odd-looking fellows can be combined to create one super-being.

It's not only a brilliant touch, but also enabled Ritman to create even more devious puzzles, as you were now forced to tackle rooms in a variety of different ways, with many of the later screens requiring a considerable amount of head scratching before you could finally move forward.

Spread across a total of five huge planets (each with its own distinct themes), and populated with some truly wacky sprites – Bernie Drummond created everything from a Prince Charles-headed Dalek to staircases made out of puppies – *Head Over Heels* is an unmissable adventure that's not only filled with enough charm to sink a battleship, but proves that two heads (okay, a head and heels) really are better than one.

"PLAYING A FUTURISTIC BOUNTY HUNTER, 3D DEATHCHASE HAD YOU SWERVING THROUGH FORESTS OF EVER-INCREASING DENSITY TO CHASE AND BLOW UP TWO MOTORCYCLISTS"





3D Deathchase

1

■ **Year:** 1983
■ **Publisher:** Micromega

Now if you're a tree hugger, tree surgeon or a puppet you might want to avert your eyes, because this is a game that will more than likely cause you to grab the closest chainsaw and stick it into the nearest available hunk of wood.

Yes, this game does absolutely nothing for relations between humans and trees, but tons for the Speccy, 9K and gamer dealings. Now there really is only one word to describe *3D Deathchase* and that word is: trees.

So, out of the billion or so Spectrum titles that were ever released, why should *3D Deathchase* be considered the zenith of the machine? After all, many magazines of the day weren't overly kind towards the game when it was released. *Sinclair User* awarded the game a measly 60% and the oracle of Spectrum gaming *Your Sinclair*, weren't massive fans of the game either. It took Stuart Campbell to right past wrongs when he compiled and wrote the magazine's Top 100 Speccy games of all time list and reserved the number one spot for this brilliantly simple game.

Admittedly, the game is blessed with the most inanimate of enemies: trees. So yes, to some it might sound like a profoundly stupid idea in principle, and with a lot of green, blue or black – depending on whether you were on 'night patrol' – permeated with plenty of lofty orangey thick lines, it would be fair to say that it didn't really look all that fantastic neither.

We would have loved to have been in the room when Mervyn Estcourt pitched his idea to Micromega though…

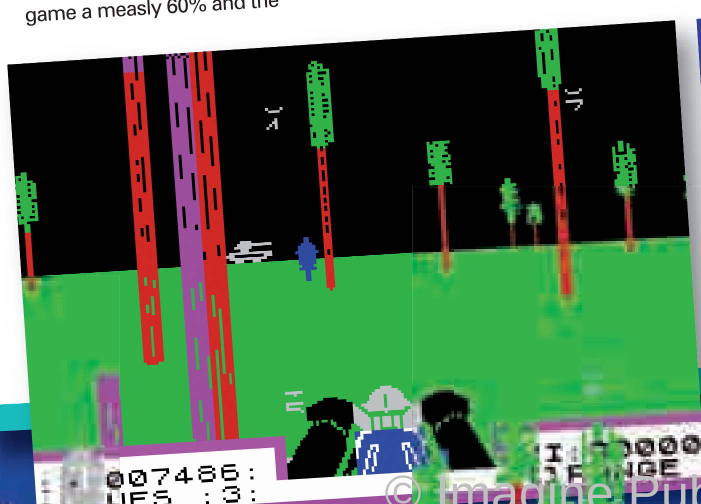
"So then Mervyn, just so I'm 100 per cent clear on this. You want to make a pseudo-3D *Space Invaders* game about driving a bike through a forest. Oh, okay, so what do you have to fight? Other bikes, okay, and these bikes, they can fight back right? They can't fight back, okay, right, so where's the actual threat, where are the enemies in your game? The trees you say, as in the green leafy things outside? And these trees, you're giving them guns right?"

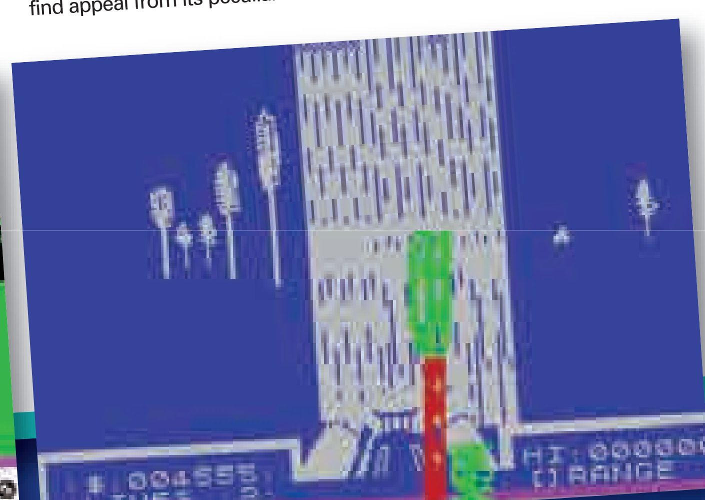
Playing a futuristic bounty hunter, *3D Deathchase* found you swerving through bountiful forests of ever-increasing density to chase and blow up two brightly coloured motorcyclists. Your enemies rely on astonishing driving abilities to draw you into groups of trees, with the hope that the Ents dish out some tree-hurt.

The greatest aspect about *3D Deathchase* was the sheer simplicity of the thing. The whole principle of the game was to avoid and invade. And the game occasionally threw in mothership-style bonus targets that allowed you to earn extra points.

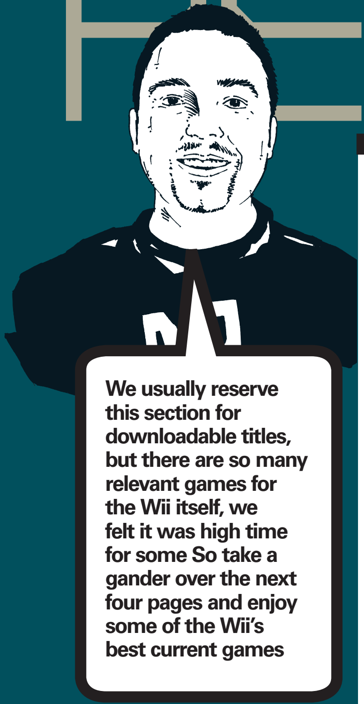
Star Wars fans would probably find appeal from its peculiar similarity to the speeder bike chases in *Return Of The Jedi*, and wannabe Jedis would lovingly replay the scenes by booting up the game in tandem with a rather rich imagination.

The game also featured brilliantly swift scrolling and, with the trees on the later stages coming at you at breakneck speeds, an ingenious and visually fathomable difficulty curve was brought to the game. And when the game switched from day to night, the menacing dark sky would cause the pursuit to become a shade twitchier and destroying those skittish bikes that extra bit harder. It was all in your head though and, secretly, you knew it. You could never get angry at *3D Deathchase*, though. With all of the game's win/lose elements so clearly defined, unwittingly becoming one with nature was always of your own doing. A genius game, with a genius concept… quite simply: genius. *3D Deathchase*, we salute you.

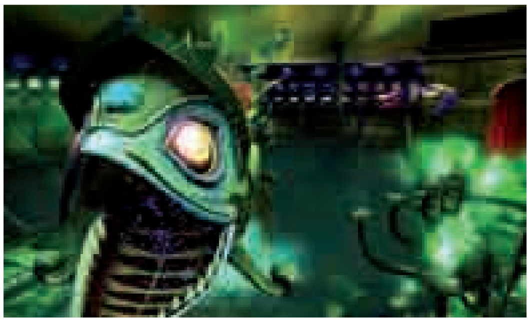




RETRORATED



NiGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS





» The many bosses you face are not only spectacular to look at, but feature extremely inventive attack patterns.

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

» **COST:** £39.99

Bart Simpson once summed up religion by stating, "You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't." The exact same sentence went through our heads when Sega announced its *NiGHTS* sequel.

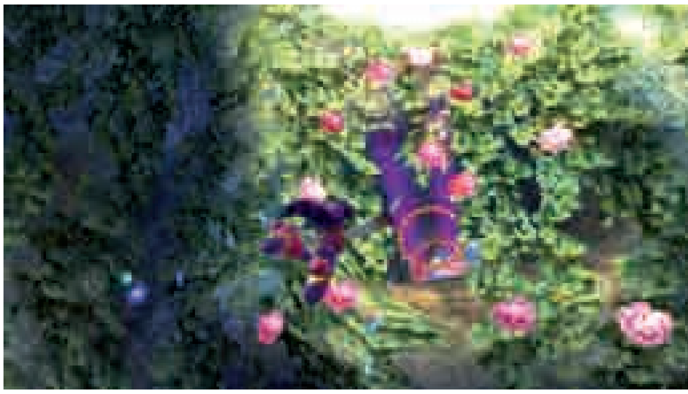
Seen by Sega itself as part of its holy trinity – *NiGHTS, Shenmue* and… well, we forget what the other one is – a sequel was always going to be a tall order. Especially as Yuji Naka, who was so intrinsic to the original's success, was no longer involved with the project and rabid fanboys had put the Saturn title on a pedestal so high it virtually reached the moon.

Nevertheless *NiGHTS: Journey Of Dreams* is now with us and while it's not the *NiGHTS* game many fans were hoping for, it's certainly nowhere near as poor as many reviews have suggested.

When *Journey Of Dreams* works, it delivers an experience that's so exhilarating you can almost feel your heart trying to escape from your chest. It lifts you with the same feeling of happiness you felt with the Saturn original and bestows a sense of euphoric joy on



» The opening levels at the beginnings of each world are the most authentic to the original game and always culminate in a short boss fight.



» Just like the original *NiGHTS*, you will find yourself playing through a variety of different viewpoints as you chase after points.

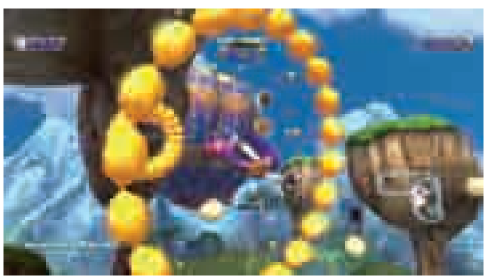
you that few other games can match. Few games nowadays can genuinely make you grin with childlike happiness, but that's what *Journey Of Dreams* does to you.

One thing we must point out, however, is that the actual gameplay is vastly different to the Saturn original. Where *Into Dreams* required you to do nothing more than fly around levels and achieve as high a grade as possible, *Journey Of Dreams* now has NiGHTS fulfilling a variety of different tasks. Each world is split into five stages. The first is a traditional *Into Dreams* stage, while the last also results in a spectacular boss fight. Those in between can be anything from following a ring-spewing octopus around and obtaining a specific amount of links, to perfectly hitting a set of musical notes in time to the glorious soundtrack. While they're vastly different in theory, the same grading system is still in place and they're more than good enough to see repeated play. In fact, out of the 30 plus missions the only ones that grate are the ones that see you rescuing Nightopians from a whirling vortex and three



» Even if the naff talking owl wasn't included, these poorly created cut-scenes are woefully inadequate and add nothing to the game.

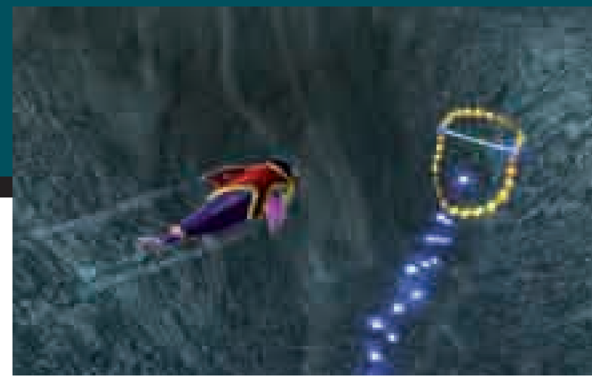
poorly conceived levels that have you playing as children called Helen and Will and running around some mazes.



» Stunning visuals that will make you feel like it's 1996 again.

Still, as good as the vast majority of stages are they're frustratingly preceded by some of the worst cut-scenes in living history. Looking unfinished and featuring god-awful voice acting and a pointless talking owl, they're incredibly ill-fitting and serve little purpose than to sap your will to live. Thankfully, once a level is completed they become skippable, so our advice is to alternate between making cups of tea and taking a toilet break at the end of each stage.

It's a shame that Sega felt the need to add a needless storyline and the handful of pointless levels, because without them *Journey Of Dreams* is a real joy to play. There's a really pleasing amount of fan service paid, some utterly fantastic looking visuals and the sort of



» Some original twists, but it still doesn't quite live up to the first *NiGHTS* game.

insanely cheerful compositions that only Sonic Team seems to have the ability to produce. There's even a surprisingly solid multiplayer race that can be played online. If only you didn't have to go through so much crap to get to all of the best bits…

PRESENTATION: 60% While there are plenty of classic touches, the atrocious cut-scenes and dire voice acting are unforgivable.

AESTHETICS: 95% In a word, stunning. The visuals are wonderfully inventive, while the rich soundtrack instantly transports you back to 1996.

PLAYABILITY: 80% Alright, so it's not authentic *NiGHTS* per se, but bar a few mishits the stages are perfectly playable and do recapture the original magic.

LONGEVITY: 84% It's going to take a fair while to perfect every length, and Sega has included enough great extras to ensure that you do.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 75% Rather difficult this, as newcomers to the franchise are less likely to feel cheated than long-term fans.

OVERALL: 83% It was never going to match our exceedingly high expectations, but we're perfectly happy with the end results.

GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

INFORMATION

- » **DEVELOPER:** KUJU
- » **COST:** £24.99

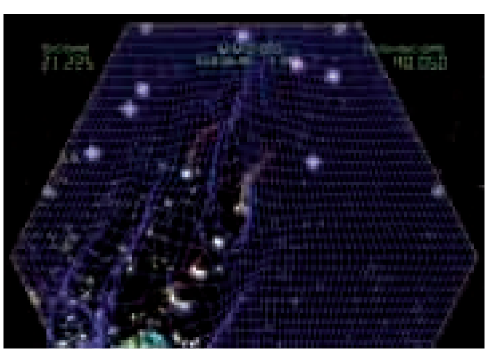
When *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* was first announced, we feared that it would suffer from the old TV-to-film effect. You know, when a classic show is stretched two to three sizes from what its audience is normally used to. It almost always ends in disaster.

Fortunately, that's not the case for *Galaxies*, and the prospect of releasing the Wii and DS versions at £25 a pop – *Retro Evolved* cost a few quid on Live Arcade – has spurred Kuju on to create an excellent shooter that never outstays its welcome.

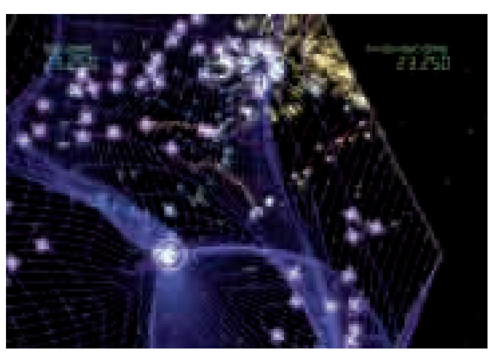
The most obvious difference to *Retro Evolved* (which is also included here) is that it looks nowhere near as spectacularly pretty as its 360 counterpart; the second is that Kuju has crammed a hell of a lot of new stuff into it, easily justifying the new price tag.

Rather than taking place on a single grid, you now visit distinctive planets, each with their own layouts and goals, meaning that each new world always offers a fresh challenge. Some stages might only give you one life, while others feature a vortex that will suck anything in that gets too close. Other new touches include a drone that will follow you around and gradually upgrade to perform different tasks, and the collecting of small Geoms that not only help to boost your score multiplier, but can also be used to unlock new planets and other extras within the game.

The only slight issue is that it takes a little while to adjust to the Remote and Nunchuk. Once you get the hang of it though you'll find *Galaxies* to be a superb shooter and an essential edition to your Wii library.



» The drone is an excellent addition to the franchise and can be powered-up to ridiculously high levels.



» *Galaxies* is certainly a purty little thing, but it just can't cope with the orgasmic visual overload of *Retro Evolved*.

PRESENTATION: 90% Very, very slick and professional.

AESTHETICS: 75% There are no issues with slowdown when the screen gets filled with enemies, and the music is suitably funky, but *Galaxies* lacks the 360's vibrancy.

PLAYABILITY: 80% The controls take a while to get used to, but the actual gameplay is sublime. Especially if you use the Classic Controller.

LONGEVITY: 87% There's an insane amount to unlock and it's going to take plenty of skill and practice to get a gold medal on each planet.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 86% Sure you can buy *Retro Evolved* for a few quid, but Kuju has added more than enough to justify the higher price.

OVERALL: 87% A brilliant shooter crammed full of old-school charm. High-score fanatics are going to love it.

RETRORATED

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **COST:** £34.99

Despite emerging near the cusp of 3D gaming some 12 years ago, Nintendo's *Super Mario 64* set precedents that few other platformers have ever been able to match, let alone better. Even the GameCube's *Super Mario Sunshine* wasn't able to get things completely right, so if Nintendo couldn't match its previous effort then what hope would the plumber have in later 3D outings?

Fortunately, it would appear that Miyamoto has got his grove well and truly back, for *Super Mario Galaxy* not only towers head and shoulders above *Sunshine*, but even manages to (occasionally) eclipse the excellence of *Super Mario 64*. It really is that special.

The Nunchuk and Remote are used to control the portly plumber, and both feel instantly natural. Like the N64's joypad, it feels as if the Wii's unique controllers had been designed with Mario in mind. The Nunchuk controls movement and crouching, while the Remote is used for jumping and picking up star bits (essential for progressing through some of the later levels). Spin attacks are pulled off with a shake of the Nunchuk or Remote, while new moves – mainly in the introduction of a selection of great suits that grant Mario specific abilities – are slowly introduced over time and feel as natural as breathing.

Where *Galaxy* really shines is in its stunning level design and, as with Mario's abilities, you're slowly introduced to them via increasingly bigger worlds. Initially you're required to do nothing more than run around a small planet and catch a few rabbits, but as your experience and confidence grow, so do the levels, until they dwarf anything seen in *Super Mario 64*. The sheer inventiveness of the levels (helped by each planet's gravity) is phenomenal and just when you think you've seen everything the game has to offer, old Shigeru throws yet another curve ball at you. Granted, a few sections are frustrating in places, but this is usually due to impatience, rather than any issues on Nintendo's part.

Although Mario's FLUDD device is nowhere to be seen, he is far from defenceless and has a number of different suits to aid him in his galaxy-spanning quest. Bee Mario allows him to fly for short distances, Boo Mario lets him pass through walls, while Ice Mario is able to freeze water. All of these skills combine together to create some really mind-bending puzzles that will not only test all your skills, but also your perception of the platformer genre. Just as he did on the N64, Miyamoto has taken a familiar genre and reshaped and remoulded it into a brand new beast that continually defies your expectations. And, unlike *The Twilight Princess*, which felt like a tired retread of *Ocarina Of Time*, *Galaxy* is refreshingly new and offers an experience that no other platformer is currently able to match.

It may have taken 11 years, but *Super Mario 64* finally has a worthy successor. Let's just hope we don't have to wait another decade for the next slice of Mario excellence.



» Make a misstep here and you'll be sucked into the whirling vortex.



» It takes quite a while to get used to *Super Mario Galaxy*'s use of physics, but it quickly becomes second nature.



retro GAMER SIZZLER

» Mario's new bee suit enables him to fly for short periods and even land briefly on clouds.

PRESENTATION: 91% Every aspect of *Super Mario Galaxy* just screams quality. Even the menus look really impressive.

AESTHETICS: 96% From its scintillating scores to its scrumptious visuals, *Galaxy* is a graphical tour de force from start to finish.

PLAYABILITY: 98% *Super Mario Galaxy* is instantly accessible and has a host of new mechanics that have been wonderfully implemented.

LONGEVITY: 95% The main game can be completed relatively quickly, but as with *Mario 64*, it's going to take a long time before you rescue all those stars.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 95% A scant £35 for the Wii's best game is a bargain.

OVERALL: 96% Quite simply the best 3D platformer currently available on any system. Truly excellent.

GHOST SQUAD

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

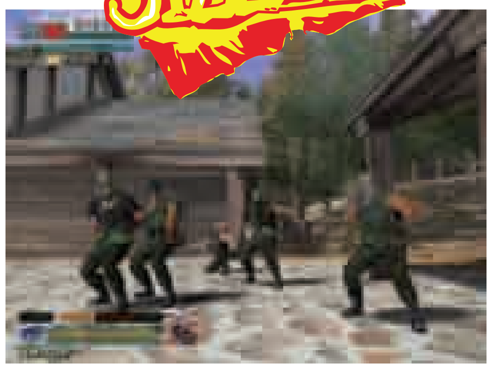
» **COST:** £34.99

We love lightguns, we really do. Maybe it's because we can pull off macho-looking poses in the privacy of our own homes, when no one is around, or it could just be because we've never grown up from playing Cowboys and Indians. Whatever the reason, it doesn't change our opinion of the genre, and this new effort from Sega (based on its hit arcade game) is absolutely brilliant.

What impresses us most about *Ghost Squad* is not so much how accurately AM2 has managed to capture



» The sniper missions require a quick eye and even quicker reflexes.



» So many bad guys, just so little time…

the original arcade game, but the large number of extras that have been crammed in. While the main game can be completed in well under an hour, each of the three stages constantly throws up new routes, missions and challenges to ensure that the replay value of the game is second to none. There's also an insane amount of weapons and costumes for you to unlock, so there will always be a reason to go back for one more go.

But that's not all. As well as the original arcade experience, AM2 has also included a multiplayer mode that features a range of excellent mini-games. *Ghost Squad* really is the game that just keeps on giving and it's going to take an age before you fully complete it. Our only concern (after playing *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles*) was that the Zapper wouldn't be up to much, but worry not as it's amazingly accurate.



» Double your points by hitting enemies in specific areas.

Ghost Squad may not deliver anything particularly new to the lightgun genre, but what it does offer is a really exhilarating arcade experience that we haven't felt since the Dreamcast days of *The House Of The Dead 2* and *Confidential Mission*. Let's hope this is the first of many Wii lightgun games to come.

PRESENTATION: 91% Easy to navigate menus, straight to the point cut-scenes and lots of extras.

AESTHETICS: 80% It looks a little rough around the edges, but it's an extremely accurate conversion of the arcade original.

PLAYABILITY: 96% Point and shoot. What could be easier? Utterly simplistic to play, with some nice gameplay additions.

LONGEVITY: 92% With 48 different level variations to go through, *Ghost Squad* will take a while to properly finish.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 88% A little pricey when bought with the Zapper, but the peripheral makes such a difference to the gameplay.

OVERALL: 90% A brilliant arcade blaster that totally reinvigorates the lightgun genre.

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

» **COST:** £34.99

When gamers first dreamt of Sonic and Mario starring in a videogame together, we're certain that they never expected it to be based on the 2008 Olympics. Nevertheless, *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* is now here, and while it's certainly not what we (or anyone else, we suspect) were expecting, it has proved to be an amazing amount of fun.

Effectively a next-generation take on *Hyper Sports*, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, *Combat School* and all those other games that required you to wriggle your joystick in a frenzy – no, not that game – *M&S* (not to be confused with the shop) is a superb sports title that totally obliterates Nintendo's own *Wii Sports*.

There's a huge number of different events to take part in – including swimming, hammer throws and hurdles – and virtually all of them are a joy to play, thanks to some extremely intuitive and well-thought-out controls. Indeed, only the fencing lacks any sort of finesse, but we've forgiven it because it allows us to take out Shadow.

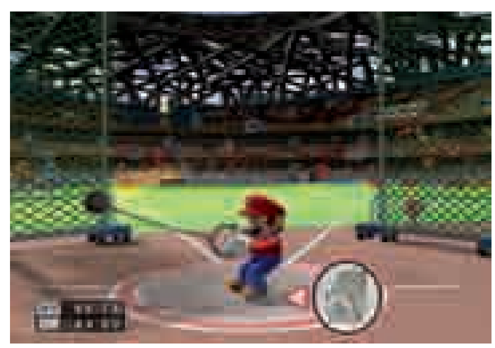
Granted, you could argue that *M&S* is yet another selection of mini-games, but they've been put together with such care and thought that you can't help but love it.



» There are lots of characters to choose from and you can even use your own Miis.



» The fencing is a real bugger to control and one of *M&S*'s few low points.



» Make sure you're wearing your strap when you're tossing the hammer. You're liable to take someone's eye out.

PRESENTATION: 83% Loads of characters, lots of secrets, all finished off with that typical Sega polish.

AESTHETICS: 85% We'll never get used to Sonic's new look, but there's no denying that *Mario & Sonic* is a mighty fine looking game.

PLAYABILITY: 91% Virtually every event is extremely easy to play, with only fencing causing difficulties.

LONGEVITY: 85% Lots to unlock, but you may not want to revisit some events as some are very similar.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 88% This game has family fun written all over it.

OVERALL: 87% Mario and Sonic's first outing is great fun. Roll on *Smash Bros Melee*.

HOMEBREW RATED

WE FIND SOME REAL TREASURE LURKING ON YE OLDE WORLD WIDE WEB

IWANAGA

WE UNCOVER A REAL TREASURE



FORMAT: PC
DEVELOPED BY: BUSTER
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
LINK: HTTP://TOKYO.COOL.NE.JP/ITAKO-RIDER/GAME.HTML
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

Oh ar! Shiver me timbers, you scallywags. We love Treasure. Truly. We have a lot of love for that developer. We also like a nice bit of buried treasure, not that we've ever come across any in our lifetime. Although writing this homebrew section can occasionally feel like digging for the small round gold stuff, especially when you come across a homebrew title that is neither a remake or a re-imagining, a game about kicking a penguin at a fireman or *Aye Caramba*.

Iwanaga is one such title, a blatant Treasure-inspired shooter from the talented Buster that's very much in the same frame of mind as games like *Cabal* and *Nam-1975*. With chunky Mega Drive-style graphics and a brilliantly simple two-button attack system, *Iwanaga* proves that the most essential ingredient for a great shoot-'em-up isn't how good it looks, but how simple it's to pick up and play.

That's not to say this game is an ugly mess, not at all. In fact, the first thing that strikes us about *Iwanaga* is just how beautiful it all looks. Harnessing the powers of the Shooter Maker Engine, Buster has managed to shape a sublime, professional-looking blaster and fitting love letter to the shoot-'em-up genre.

The action in *Iwanaga* is fundamentally split between two planes: ground – where you'll be controlling your robot, and air – where you'll move and fire using a crosshair. Essentially, you attack enemies that are hovering above you by holding down the shoot button (*Nam-1975* style) to move the crosshair; and those at ground level by releasing and tapping the attack buttons, which draws a hefty spinning-sword attack.

Astute Treasure lovers will instantly spot *Iwanaga*'s unsubtle homage's to many of its classic games. Well, there's that *Ikaruga*-sounding title for starters, a neat dual-weapon system and an invulnerable dash function, à la *Alien Soldier*, and then there are the power-ups that you absorb from the fallen enemies that look a little bit like Treasure motifs.

In summing up, *Iwanaga* plays brilliantly, serving up some really chaotic action and screen-strangling enemies to vanquish. It's certainly one of the most fulsome-feeling freebies we've come across in a long while. If you consider yourself any kind of shmup fan you really owe it to yourself to download this… it's a real treasure.

PRESENTATION: 90% Looks like a blistering 16-bit gem.
AESTHETICS: 90% Makes your eyes, ears and pants tingle.
PLAYABILITY: 90% Really easy to grasp, brilliant controls and immense fun to play – ticks all the boxes then
LONGEVITY: 80% Serves up a reasonably difficult challenge, but nothing a little practice won't combat.
VALUE FOR MONEY: NA
OVERALL: 88%



» It looks good, it plays well, it's free… go play it!



» *Iwanaga* has more than a few similarities with a number of classic Treasure games.



» It's reasonably difficult, but if you play it enough, you'll soon get the hang of it and, most likely, get a lot of enjoyment out of it.

THE HOMEBREW SECTION STARTS TO SMELL A LITTLE FISHIE, AND AN OLD CPC PORT DRAGS US AWAY FROM IWANAGA… FOR TWO MINUTES

FISHIE FISHIE

FISHIE FINGERS AT THE READY, FOLKS

FORMAT: PC
DEVELOPED BY: FARBS.ORG
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
LINK: WWW.FARBS.ORG
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT



The most brilliant aspect of *Fishie Fishie* – other than the brilliant title – is that it's a game that can be played using one finger – or a toe, a nose or a very thin elbow. Now we're sure this isn't the first homebrew game to boast such a feature, but it's certainly one of the best that our index fingers and marble-chipped keyboards have ever come across.

Now there are three things that fish essentially do: eat, swim and make miniature sausages; this game covers two. Playing the



» A very simple premise – eat as many fish as possible before your timer runs out. Each fish you eat will boost your time slightly.



» The controls are incredibly simple – you just need one finger.

role of a cannibal clownfish, you have to steer your orange avatar into the smaller, weaker fishes – avoiding any larger indigestible trawl – and devour them all before a rather annoying timer depletes and kills you for some unknown reason. Sounds easy, right? Well, ironically, the difficulty of the game comes in the form of its very simple controls. You see, your fish – in its default state – continually travels anticlockwise on the spot, but whenever you press any button on your keyboard he will swim clockwise instead. Therefore, you can travel in a reasonably straight line and pick up speed by quickly tapping your chosen action button.

Thankfully, every time you guzzle up small schools of fish, your timer will increase slightly, giving you a bit more time to play with. There's also a handy combo meter that



» If you're feeling hungry, then *Fishie Fishie* is the game for you.

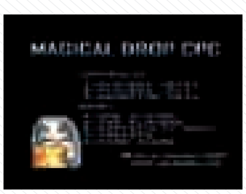
awards you bonus points for getting from starter to main course in quick succession. *Fishie Fishie* is a game that rewards practice and perseverance, and if that sounds appetising to you then you really should probably invest the time to download this quirky little game pronto.

PRESENTATION: 75% Graphics are crisp and bright, think *Finding Nemo*, made in 1989.
AESTHETICS: 76% Feels nice and simple, it's easy enough to dip in and out of.
PLAYABILITY: 79% With one button controls, even the dead can play it – but it's simple.
LONGEVITY: 80% Has a very nice difficulty curve, that you'll probably want to see right through to the end.
VALUE FOR MONEY: NA

OVERALL: 74%

MAGICAL DROP CPC

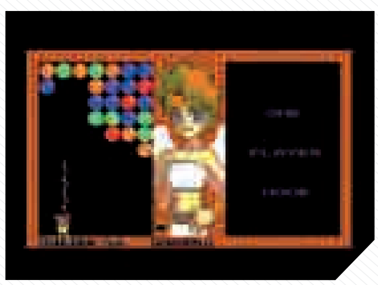
UNDERPLAYED PUZZLE GAME, (GIVEN THAT IT'S APPEARING ON THE CPC) GETS AN UNDERPLAYED PORT



FORMAT: PC
DEVELOPED BY: OSCAR SANCHEZ
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
LINK: WWW.CPCMANIA.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

From Oscar Sanchez comes a neat little CPC port of an underplayed Data East puzzle series that started its life in the arcades. *Magical Drop* is a game that can be best described as a mixture of *Puzzle Bobble* and *Tetris*. With colourful looking bubbles stacked at the top of the screen and a cute jester avatar with a nifty harpoon gun plonked at the bottom, it would be fair to say that look-wise, the game certainly sits more inside the *Puzzle Bubble* camp.

You have two fire buttons – one to pick up bubbles and the other to fire them from your gun – and you clear each screen by sucking up the bubbles with one fire button



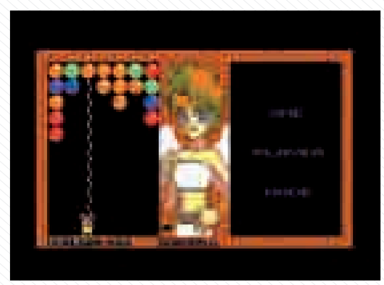
» Not particularly pretty, and not particularly good either.

and stacking three or more corresponding coloured bubbles together using the other.

While the premise is solid enough, serving as a neat puzzle game that can often be more about being quick on the draw, rather than lateral thinking. Given that there's only one game board, showing an ugly fairy standing up against a brick wall, the game will probably struggle to hold interest over long periods.

Magical Drop does, however, look beautifully vibrant, typically CPC and also comes bundled with a neat co-op mode. The sounds in the game aren't going to make your ears ejaculate love hearts, but they do their desired role well.

Overall, *Magical Drop* is an enjoyable enough puzzle game that fans of the series



» It plays a little bit like *Puzzle Bobble* and *Tetris*.

will either respect or unfairly laugh at, the rest of us will probably have a few minutes of fun with it and then load up *Iwanaga*.

PRESENTATION: 40% With one pithy level, you're in for a treat if you like staring at grossly big-headed fairies and brick walls.
AESTHETICS: 70% Feels brilliantly CPC thanks to its bold, colourful graphics.
PLAYABILITY: 65% With no tutorial, once you get to grips with what you're supposed to be doing the game becomes quite enjoyable for a few minutes.
LONGEVITY: 65% Best appreciated in very short bursts, although two spats are quite enjoyable.
VALUE FOR MONEY: NA

OVERALL: 62%

BARGAIN HUNT

HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is *Retro Gamer*'s buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

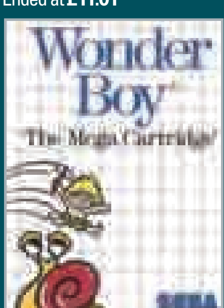
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific categories. This month we take a look at Master System arcade conversions

R-TYPE
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£16.67**



WONDER BOY
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£11.01**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

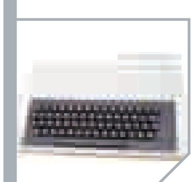
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released.
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

ACORN



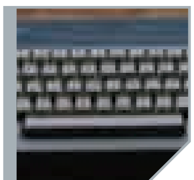
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**

Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

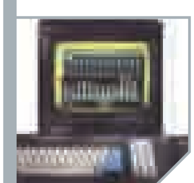
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor.



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($165+)**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- GET DEXTER
- XOR
- SORCERY +



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**

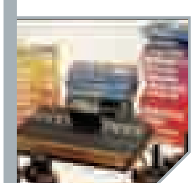
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

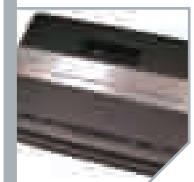
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

- ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- HEN'S TEETH
- LUCKY FIND
- EBAY REGULAR
- CAR-BOOT SALE BARGAIN



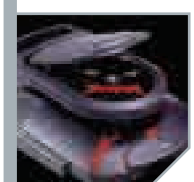
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

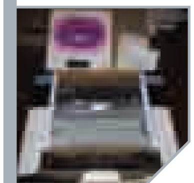


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

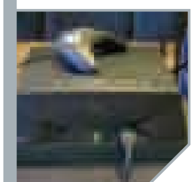
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**
Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA 500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



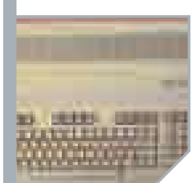
C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the bestselling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND

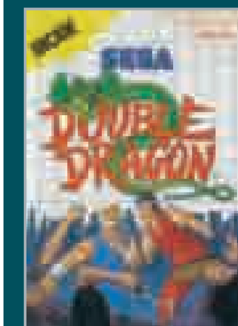


C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

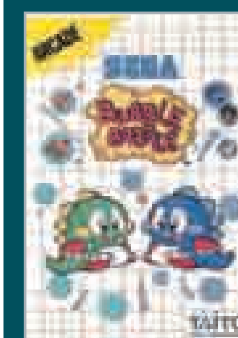


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

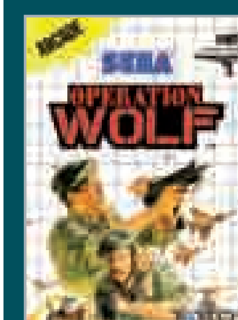
DOUBLE DRAGON
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No Sale**



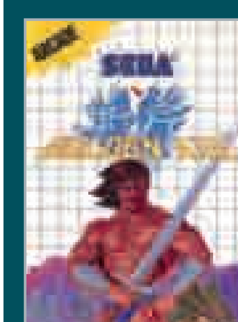
BUBBLE BOBBLE
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **18.55**



OPERATION WOLF
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£5.37**



GOLDEN AXE
Normally sells for **£4**
Ended at **No Sale**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established the Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



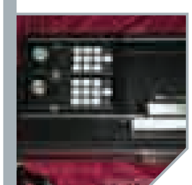
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
- MARS BAR
- BOUNTY
- DIME BAR



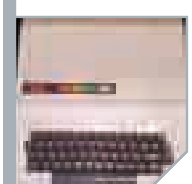
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More insanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio had hoped it would do better than its PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) from the USA**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson that had numerous different clones released, as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



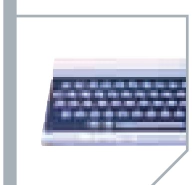
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act. Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



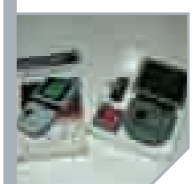
ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



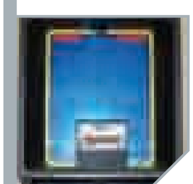
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



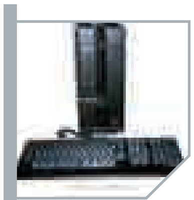
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.

- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

MSX



MSX 1

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.

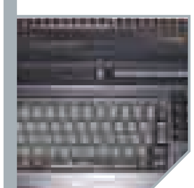
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.

- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+

» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.

- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.

- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

NEC



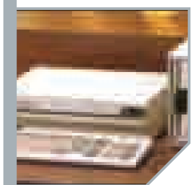
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)

» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



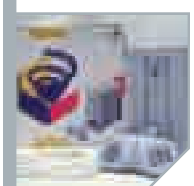
PC-8801

» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801

» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.

- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.

- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- PC KID
- OUTRUN



SUPER GRAFX

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.

- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



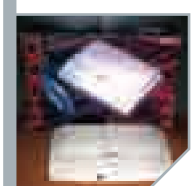
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD

» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PC-E and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PC-E DUO/TURBO DUO

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PC-E/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PC-E Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.

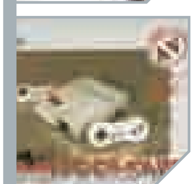
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!



FAMICOM AV

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.

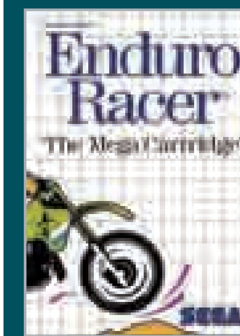


FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

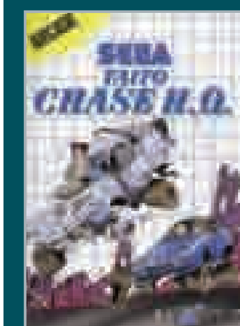
ENDURO RACER

Normally sells for **£4**
Ended at **£9.89**



CHASE HQ

Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£7.12**



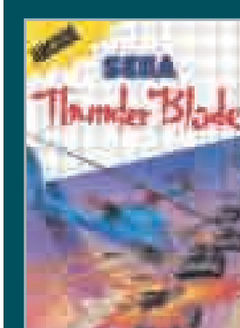
STRIDER

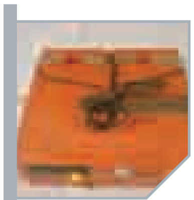
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£1.59**



THUNDER BLADE

Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£3.48**





SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



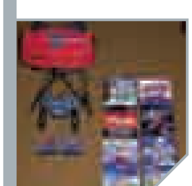
NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



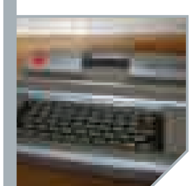
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



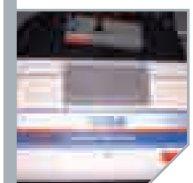
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



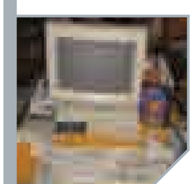
SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history. The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



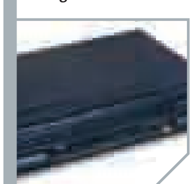
SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad

hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

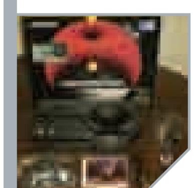


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.

- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.

- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR



ZX80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



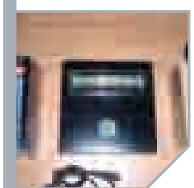
ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)

- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR

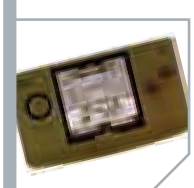


NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



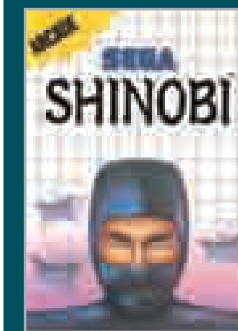
NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

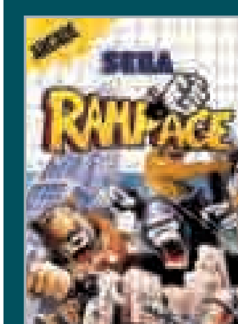
SHINOBI
Normally sells for **£4**
Ended at **£1.01**



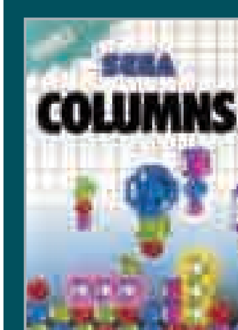
OUTRUN
Normally sells for **£3**
Ended at **£7.01**



RAMPAGE
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **10.95**



COLUMNS
Normally sells for **£12**
Ended at **£3.67**



retro GAMER

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 27 MAR 2008

LOAD 49

FORGET DUNGEONS & DRAGONS...

THE HISTORY OF MIGHT & MAGIC

WITH THE INCOMING XBOX 360 RELEASE NEARLY UPON US, WE TAKE A LOOK AT HOW THE POPULAR PC FRANCHISE HAS EVOLVED SINCE ITS 1986 RELEASE



MORE EXCITING FEATURES...

- We go behind the scenes of the recently released *Contra 4* and discover how WayForward Technologies created its own essential addition to the classic series
- In a brand new feature, Stuart Campbell decides to champion the ten most obscure racers that you've never heard of, let alone played
- Gain a fascinating insight into the American 8-bit company Epyx, as we talk to key members about some of its most popular games

RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO MICHAEL FRASER ABOUT HIS AMUSING SPECTRUM TRIBUTE SITE, THE RUBBER BEERMAT

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site that's dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site that covers every single machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au/
A fantastic forum that caters for an Australian audience. There's plenty of great topics to participate in.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com/
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews, an excellent and friendly forum and lots of pretty screenshots.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com/
Brilliant Amiga website run by Kim Lemon, the owner of the excellent Lemon 64.

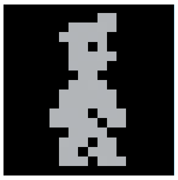
THE MEAN MACHINES ARCHIVE
www.neo-geo.com
Although dedicated to SNK's AES and MVS, there's plenty of coverage here to enjoy, with every system covered.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org/
Dedicated to the latest import games, there is a very informative section that offers useful advice on rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you thought the Atari 2600 was ancient then you may want to visit this site. Expect a feature on obscure computers very, very soon.

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com/
There's a Sega slant to Racket Boy, but don't let that put you off visiting, as it's a lot of fun and boasts a bubbly forum.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net/
If you're a fan of Sega music you'll love Radio Sega, as there are tons of fantastic Sega tunes to listen to.



When did you first set World of Spectrum up?
That was during a night shift on 29-30 November 1995, basically as a distribution point for SGD (Spectrum Games Database – www.worldofspectrum.org/sgd.html).

Why choose the Spectrum then?
I'd had a Spectrum since 1983 and had used it exclusively until 1993, so I just wanted to keep the hobby going.

What gives World of Spectrum the edge over other similar formats?
That's probably due to the enormous fan base behind the ZX Spectrum. People in this community are incredibly active (rather than just talking a lot), and set their collective mind to preserve the full legacy. This can be seen by the continuous stream of new material that's constantly provided on a daily basis, and the various preservation projects that are going on. Also notice that over 60 new games are still written per year, published either commercially or for free. Rather good games, too.

What's the most popular part of the website?
The forum is pretty active. Material-wise, it seems that the magazine scans are best liked by most of our members.

Do you encounter any problems from publishers due to the games that are available?
No serious problems to date, no. There were encounters with one or two publishers who wanted their software gone, which was of course done immediately (although we did think it was allowed as each of the authors had given us previous permission).

What sets the Spectrum community apart from other communities is the fact that we care about copyrights; one of the larger projects we run is about exactly that: finding all copyright holders and asking permission. Interestingly, we get it in 98 per cent of the cases (where we get responses).

How can our readers contribute to the site?
As mentioned, there are various preservation projects going. We look to preserve anything and everything related to the Spectrum (software, hardware, magazines, books and so on). If your readers could check their lofts for any material we're still looking for, that would be great!

How much of your time is taken up with WOS?
I spend about 35 hours per week on average, although the trend is still going up (over 40 hours per week in the past couple of months).

Have you ever considered running a similar site for another machine?
I did consider other Sinclair systems such as the ZX81 a number of years ago, but if I'm honest, I simply wouldn't have the time to do it properly.

> "PEOPLE IN THIS COMMUNITY ARE VERY ACTIVE AND SET THEIR MIND TO PRESERVE THE FULL LEGACY"

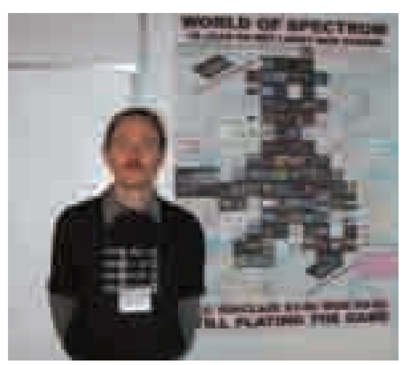


DEEPER LOOK - WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

World of Spectrum
www.worldofspectrum.org

We've mentioned World of Spectrum numerous times in past issues of **Retro Gamer**, but that's because it's simply the best ZX Spectrum resource that's currently available on the internet. There are literally thousands of pages of scanned magazines to plough through, an excellent forum that's full of helpful and pleasant members, and a huge amount of classic games that you can actually play.

The site is constantly updated, the amount of available information is staggering and it sets an impossibly high benchmark that no other site has ever been able to match. World of Spectrum is quite simply one of the greatest resource sites on the net. If you've ever loved Sir Clive's 8-bit machine you owe it to yourself to check it out.



THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com/
Superb monthly podcast that gives an exhaustive look at the US game's market courtesy of Shane Monroe.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
While it features the latest games, there's a dedicated retro section filled with plenty of informative members. The Pickford bros are also mods.

SHOOT THE CORE
www.shootthecore.moonpod.com
Great site that loves all shmups. There are plenty of homebrew efforts to download here, so you'll never be short of something to blast.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com/
While there's plenty of Sega love here, System 16 is also dedicated to covering as many different arcade games as possible.

VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com/
This site has pretty much everything. Screenshots, cover scans and reviews. It's all here and all good.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Run by **Retro Gamer**'s very own Damien McFerran, this is your definitive stop for anything Virtual Console related.

MAC RETRO
www.macretro.tk/
Brilliant site that's dedicated to getting emulators running on the Mac. There's lots of info and it's all easy to follow.

WORLD OF SPECTRUM
DEEPER LOOK
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb site with a friendly forum and plenty of legal Spectrum games to enjoy.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory please contact Darran at darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk



MARVEL SUPER HEROES VS. STREET FIGHTER

The Capcom team certainly loved their Vs. series, and you can't really blame them. After all, tell us another game that allows you to pit the thunder thighs of Chun-Li against the Hulk?



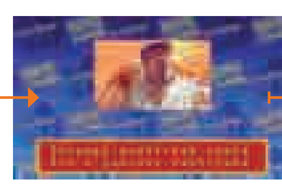
SCREEN 1
Ryu battles the awesome might of Apocalypse while Captain America sits just off screen enjoying a nice cup of tea. Ryu grits his teeth and wonders, not for the first time, why he couldn't have just teamed up with Ken instead.



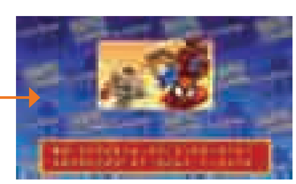
SCREEN 2
"Bloody hell Cap, I'm fighting a mechanised Akuma and he's kicking my arse. Where the hell are you?" asks Ryu, as he gets hit to the floor. "Sorry Ryu, my nice biscuit fell in my tea and I was getting it out," comes Cap's reply.



SCREEN 3
Here's what's missing from the above screenshots: "Well, thanks for nothing Cap. I'm here, risking my life and you're sitting on your arse enjoying a quick cuppa. I hope those doves crap on you."



SCREEN 4
Incensed by Captain America's lack of help, Ryu decides it's time to go all Kane-like and travel the world. Which, according to *Pulp Fiction*'s Vincent Vega, is just another way of saying you're a bum.



SCREEN 5
As Ryu walks away, he thinks about all the opponents he has pummelled into submission and wonders if he'll ever find a decent challenge. Leaving us to wonder just what the hell is in that backpack of his.